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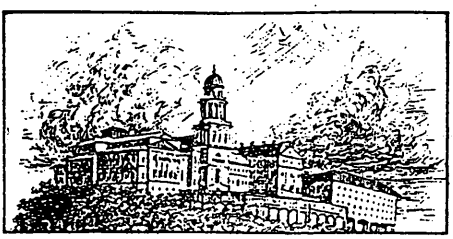
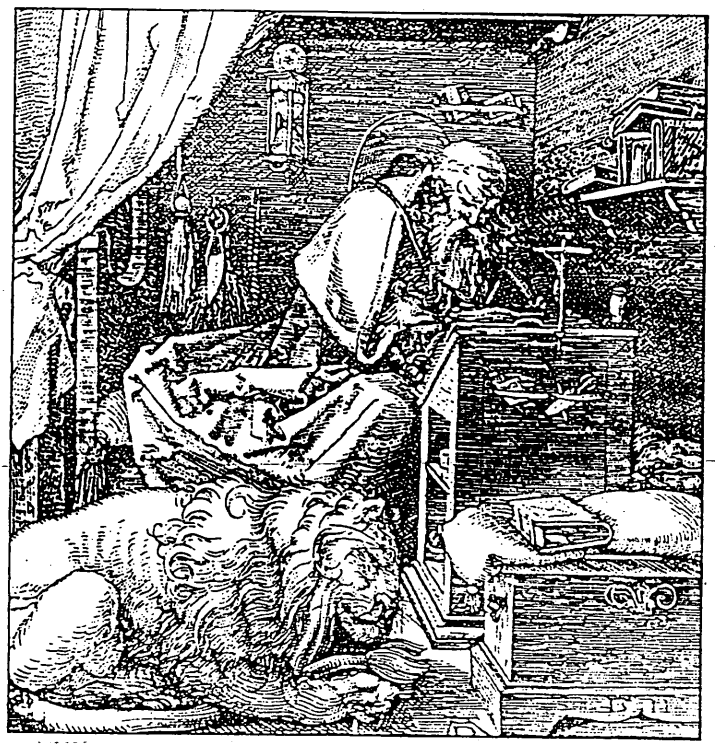


LITERARY THEORY AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

Edited by
TIBOR FABINY



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Proceedings of the International Conference:
„Reading Scripture – Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics"
Pannonhalma, Hungary, 4th–6th July, 1991.

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Contents

The Editor's Preface

The essays of the present volume are the proceedings of the international conference on „Reading Scripture – Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics" held in the Benedictine Monastery of Pannonhalma, Hungary between 4th–6th July, 1991. The conference was co-organized by David Jasper, Director of the Centre for the Study of Literature and Theology of The University of Durham, Great Britain and Tibor Fabiny, Lecturer in English Literature at Attila József University, Szeged, Hungary and was hosted by Father Elemér Sulyok O.S.B.

The purpose of the conference was to discuss new issues in biblical hermeneutics in a postmodern world and in a postcritical context. Papers were invited to answer the question whether literature would/could emerge as a new paradigm of interpretation in succession, or parallel to, historical-critical methods. Issues such as the nature of biblical language, myth, metaphor, parable, narrative, symbolism, reader-response criticism and so on, were suggested for discussion. Participants were invited to investigate the question whether the new literary approaches could bring so far hidden or forgotten theological issues of Scripture to the surface.

The organizors of the conference welcomed the vivid interest in the questions raised and the great variety of papers delivered within these three days. Being aware of the wide range of, or even sometimes contradictory approaches, the editorial policy has been to include all the sixteen essays of the conference, including the contribution of Gerald T. Sheppard who had to cancel his visit in the last minute but as he kindly submitted his presentation, we are happy to publish it along with the others. It seemed desiderable to divide the essays into four thematic or methodological groups such as „Horizons", „Methods", „Issues" and „Applications" respectively. There has been no attempt to unify the notes or bibliographies attached to the essays.

In some cases, versions of some of the papers have already been, or are being published in *Literature and Theology* and *Hermathena.* or collections of essays like *Translating Religious Texts* (ed. David Jasper), or in *Radical Pluralism and Truth: David Tracy and the Hermeneutics of Religion* (ed. Werner G. Jeanrond and Jennifer L. Rike). The Editor of the present volume is grateful to Editors David Jasper and Werner G. Jeanrond for supporting this publication.

Above all, the Editor is grateful to the Department of English, Attila József University, Szeged for the inclusion of this volume in their series „Papers in English and American Studies".

Szeged, 18th of June, 1992.

HORIZONS

DAVID E. KLEMM

Subjectivity and Divinity in Biblical Hermeneutics

The question concerning the status of the subject is the systematic focal point of modern philosophical concern. Modern philosophy grounds itself in its understanding of the self as centered I, a subject of thinking. In the modern philosophical conception, the subjectivity of the self has the meaning of an undefinable universal: I am subject and never object. Nonetheless, in this view the self is both immediately conscious of its subjectivity as an inescapable and necessary origin point of its representations, and it can mediate that certainty to itself. Recently, however, debates have raged concerning the „self-assertive" pretensions of the „modern" philosophical conception of the self brought forth by Descartes and amplified by Kant and his idealist successors.[1] Many European and American critics argue that the central notion of the subject-centered self should be replaced with an alternative notion of the origin, nature, and purpose of the self.[2] The suggestions are manifold and heterogeneous in kind but they share a common desire to escape the subject-centered conception of the „modern self".[3] It is of utmost importance for hermeneutical thinkers, that clarity be achieved concerning the question of the status of the subject-centered self. Is escape from the subject-centered self desirable? Is it even possible? Let me focus for a moment on the discipline of hermeneutics to show the force of the question.

Hermeneutical thinkers in the line of influence from Schleiermacher to Ricoeur, claim that reading and comprehending texts involve an act of understanding oneself anew in the mirror of the text. Comprehending a text involves both working out a meaning that is grounded in the structure of the text and following its reference to the world projected by the text. The meaning of a text arises in the reciprocal relation between the world disclosed by the text and the reader. Presupposed by hermeneutics are the ideas of the self, the world, and the absolute unity of self and world, God. If

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[1] See, for example, the extended discussion of this issue in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures,* translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, England: The MIT Press, 1987).

[2] Some of the more obvious challenges to the subject-centered self are those of structuralism and semiotics, the post-structuralist deconstruction theory of Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault's reflection on power operating through discrete historical periods, radical feminist literary criticism, and even the later Heidegger's substitution of „being" for the subject. See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* for discussions, pp. 161–293.

[3] The irony of „postmodern" criticism of the modern self is, of course, that the modern self is the fully self-critical self. Universal subjectivity in the modern understanding is the power of criticism. Any responsible critique of the modern self cannot help but be modern.

these universal but undefinable ideas cannot be accounted for, hermeneutics cannot be coherent. If writers and thinkers decide not to account for these ideas, but rather to „escape" the responsibility of grounding hermeneutical methods and practices, they abandon understanding as the starting point and goal of hermeneutics as well. One problem which arises with the attempt to „escape" these ideas is that while said writers and thinkers may *use* language as a means of coercion or persuasion, they cannot *make sense* of language with respect to the aim or goal „for the sake of which" they engage in interpretive activity; they cannot make sense of language *as* language. If it is taken seriously as an intellectual project, the attempt to escape rather than to understand the subject-centered self, along with the cognate ideas of world and God, renders itself contradictory. *Who* escapes? Someone must answer, „I do," thus invoking the subject-centered self from which escape is desired. The rhetoric of escape cannot be used for the sake of truth; it therefore must function in some other way, for the sake of some pleasure or power.

Nonetheless, many scholars today believe that post-structuralist developments in critical thought have rendered hermeneutics obsolete. They are the postmodern cultured despisers of the modern subject-centered self. For them, hermeneutics can be viewed as one more method that can be negated by an all-devouring movement of criticism eternally in search of the new. They charge against hermeneutics, that we do not stand in a relationship of „understanding" to the meaning of texts, because neither the self nor the world, and especially not God, are unified realities to which we have access through thought or language. Textual meanings, as well as the world and selves disclosed in texts, are constructed through a system of signs which endlessly defers arriving at a stable „meaning" or a given „self" as a unity. Texts and selves are therefore to be deconstructed to reveal the pretensions of their claims, especially when our received understandings of them become arbitrary authorities or obstacles to an unspecifiable liberation. These writers and thinkers challenge us to follow them in a nomadic intellectual life.

Before we abandon the subject-centered self as the traditional finite „home" of meaning in the world, however, let us reflect on what exactly the hermeneutical thinkers do hold in principle with regard to the question of the status of the subject-centered self. I think we shall find that according to hermeneutical doctrine, the subject of the self is always already „de-centered" in a specific sense. This essay attempts to present in the most elementary way an answer to the question of the status of the subject-centered self and to defend it against its postmodern detractors. Moreover, in presenting an answer on behalf of hermeneutics, this essay specifically addresses an invitation to the postmodern critics who have already packed their bags with ironic twists and satiric turns in an effort to „escape subjectivity," and who have subsequently found themselves lost in the desert of self-contradiction. The invitation reads: „Come home to the unity with yourself that is found in affirming the necessary

first principles of your own being. The first principles of self, world, and God, from which you flee are ever with you. Escape, if you will, the *particularities* to which the first principles have been applied in the past; seek new syntheses. But realize in so doing that you abandon not the first principles, for they make possible any attempted escape just as much as any contemplated return."

This playful invitation recalls in the domain of profane theory a story from sacred scripture, which conveys a message about the nature of self, world, and God in the understanding process itself: the Parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11–32. This parable has long been understood within the Christian tradition to narrate events that are disclosive of the connectedness between the self's being a self within the world and God's being God as the final ground of self and world: God's kingdom, the realm of the divine, is what it is as what happens to the prodigal son, when he abandons his home, squanders his inheritance, finds himself bankrupt both materially and spiritually, returns repentently to his patient father, and is received with compassion, even exuberance, by his father as the son he is (in spite of some resentment by his elder brother). The story of the son's losing and finding himself opens in the world of the text for the reader a vision of the being of God.[4]

There is an analogy between the postmodern critic and the prodigal son. In reading the parable of the prodigal son, the postmodern critic would behave like the prodigal son. The postmodern critic would abandon the traditional home of meaning, by trying to show how the linguistic signs of the text endlessly distinguish themselves from the conceptually signified, such that the story cannot possibly perform for the reader the advent of the „kingdom of God" taken as a „ transcendental signified" beyond the drift of signs. The postmodern critic could try to show that the intentions of the prodigal son, the father, and the elder son, as well as the history of the interpretation of the story, can be assigned to impersonal semiotic systems of power and persuasion, such that neither the actions recorded in the parable nor the interpretations of the parable can properly be ascribed to subject-centered selves at all. The postmodern critic would escape the first principles of hermeneutics, especially the principle of subjectivity, in order to decode texts otherwise than as meanings embodied in language.

The question, however, is whether it is possible at all to take leave of first principles, except by means of first principles. In which case, of course, one claims in

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[4] On the parable of the prodigal son read hermeneutically, see for example Robert P. Scharlemann, *The Being of God: The Experience of Truth in Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 1983), p. 125, Paul Ricoeur, „Listening to the Parables", in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur,* edited by Charles E. Reagan and David Stewart and (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978), pp. 239–245; Dan O. Via, Jr., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 162–176.

fact to escape that from which no escape can be made in principle. The cost of the ironic posture of „escaping subjectivity" is to live a lie, to become the „impossible possibility" which substitutes a semblance for the truth. The invitation herein issued to the postmodern critic, however, is precisely to come to an event of self-recognition through the encounter with the world of Luke's text. In reading the parable, the postmodern critic can still recognize his or her own „I" precisely as the subject of a living contradiction, so proclaimed before the world and grounded nonetheless in God. Such an event of recognition is the intended meaning of the parable for the postmodern critic.

In this essay, I shall attempt to present and to defend the first principles of hermeneutics, especially insofar as they bear on the doctrines of subjectivity and divinity, self and God. I hope to show the wayward postmodern critic that insofar as he or she must also assent to the same principles, the way „back home" out of contradiction is always open. For the task of articulating the first principles of hermeneutics, I refer to Friedrich Schleiermacher, father of modern hermeneutics. Schleiermacher presents the philosophical foundations for hermeneutical inquiry in his lectures on dialectic. There we find a clear statement of the first principles of hermeneutics.

Within Schleiermacher's system, hermeneutics deals with the principles and conditions governing the theory and practice of understanding meanings in language, and rhetoric deals reciprocally with the principles and conditions governing the activity of producing meanings in language. Both hermeneutics and rhetoric are subordinate to the discipline of dialectic as the presentation, in the region of pure thinking, of the principles and conditions under which differences between disputing voices in dialogue are brought to their unity in knowing.[5] Dialectic is a conversation about conversation to show in principle how disagreement can be overcome by referring both parties of a formal dispute to the lawfulness of knowing, expressed as the „truth". As such, dialectic is a knowing about knowing or a *Wissenschaftslehre.* It provides the theoretical basis for all other sciences.

More recent hrmeneutical thinkers, the sons and daughters of Schleiermacher, do not differ in principle from Schleiermacher. Differences arise in applying the principles and articulating more fully what follows from them under changed circumstances of thinking. I have in mind Paul Ricoeur, who might be thought of as the

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[5] I shall be referring to *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik,* edited by Rudolf Oderbrecht (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1942). This edition is based on Schleiermacher's lectures at the University of Berlin in 1822. For an excellent study of the dialectic, see Karl Pohl, „Die Bedeutung der Sprache für den Erkenntnisakt in der 'Dialektik' Friedrich Schleiermachers, *Kant-Studien* 46, 4 (1954–55), pp. 302–332.

Schleiermacher for our time.[6] Ricoeur, like Schleiermacher, bases hermeneutics on principles presented in dialectic, or, as Ricoeur calls it, in a „pure reflection" on the structure and meaning of being human.[7] Whereas Schleiermacher concentrates to a greater degree than Ricoeur on the task of spelling out universal principles and conditions for resolving disputes in dialogue, Ricouer engages in concrete disputes among dialogue partners in which he applies the same principles for mediating between the competing representations.[8] In mediating actual disputes, Ricoeur makes original contributions to hermeneutical thought. For example, Ricoeur deepens Schleiermacher's insight into the nature of language as the medium of mediation; Ricoeur extends the analysis of language to include its metaphorical function of creating new meaning through dialectical criticism of the old; and Ricoeur develops a narrative theory showing how narrative discourse mediates between human experiences of temporality and eternity. In none of these scholarly tasks does Ricoeur break with Schleiermacher in principle; in every case Ricoeur displays the power and necessity of the principle. What, then is the principle?

According to Schleiermacher, the first principle is *individuality.*[9] By the principle of „individuality", Schleiermacher refers to the unifying principle by means of which universal (or ideal) and particular (or real) dimensions of thinking and being are connected and distinguished. Schleiermacher's claim is that universal and particular features of things are underivable from each other; hence the principles of universality

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[6] Ricoeur's appropriation of Schleiermacher's „text-based hermeneutics" is well known. See for example, Paul Ricoeur, „Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics", *The Monist* 60 (1977), pp.181–197. To my knowledge, however, Ricoeur does not make explicit reference to the *Dialektik*, although Ricoeur's own thinking corresponds to the principles presented there by Schleiermacher.

[7] Paul Ricoeur, *Fallible Man*, revised translation by Charles Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986) and more recently *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1990).

[8] I am not making the genetic point that Ricoeur directly appropriates Schleiermacher's principles in the dialectic. I am rather claiming that Ricoeur's hermeneutical inquiries are fully consistent with those principles, whether intended or not.

[9] In the *Dialektik*, Schleiermacher analyzes the way in which the reasoning activity in the narrow sense (thinking) and the organizing activity (perceiving) can be traced back to the ground of their unity in intuition, finitely speaking in individual self-consciousness and absolutely speaking in God. See *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, pp. 125–187. For a careful study of the principle of individuality in Schleiermacher relative to the various strands of transcendental idealism, see Heinz Kimmerle, „Das Verhältnis Schleiermacher zum transzcendentalen Idealismus," *Kant-Studien* 51, 4 (1959–60), pp. 410–427. In the current debate, Schleiermacher's principle of individuality is presented and defended by Manfred Frank, in *Die Unhintergehbarkeit von Individualität: Reflexionen über Subjekt, Person und Individuum aus Anlaß ihrer 'postmodernen' Toterklärung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), see especially pp. 116–131, and in *Das individuelle Allgemeine: Textstrukturierung und -interpretation nach Schleiermacher* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977), pp. 87–144.

or ideality and particularity or reality are independent of each other. These three fundamental principles – the principle of universal form (the ideal), the principle of particular matter (the real), and the principle of their individual unity – are universal and necessary, for any attempt to disclaim them merely reinstates them. As first principles, they constitute the basic structure of being and meaning at all levels.

For example, on systematic grounds *„being"* for Schleiermacher is always a connection and connecting between particular and universal elements. The being of actual objects is an individual connection in the object itself between a universal thought and a particular manifold of sense impressions united into a percept. The being of the object is posited by the self and articulated in a linguistic judgment, which is the model for the text and other higher level linguistic unities. *„Meaning"* as it occurs in a judgment is the unitary individual sense understood by the self through the combination of concrete subject, abstract predicate, and unifying copula.[10] The being of a thing and the meaning of an assertion are strictly coordinate: each is an individual connection of a universal element with a particular one.

Schleiermacher's ontology and hermeneutics are structured by the individuality claim, which holds that there is more to the being of an object or the meaning of an assertion than the logical relation between particular and universal elements alone, because the particular element is not derivable from the universal, and vice versa, but each element must be connected with the other in a synthesis of identity and difference.[11] According to Schleiermacher, the individual connection occurs in a different medium from the universal and particular elements it connects. The medium of the individual appearance of being and meaning is „intuition", by which he means the mediated unity between thinking and perceiving. The mediated unity is called *„ein Gedankending"* or „though-thing" by Schleiermacher. It can be argued on the basis of a close reading of Schleiermacher's text, that by *„Gedankending"*, Schleiermacher means *„language"*. Language, conceived as a historically determinate system of signs, makes possible the synthesis between thought and percept, because language is both thought and thing.[12] The word connects the universality of thought with the particularity of material being. Because meaning and being are produced as individuals, objects or texts are intelligible, but never completely. There is always something irreducible about an individual.

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[10] *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, pp. 340–343.

[11] Schleiermacher uses the language of an „oscillation" between opposites and an „intuition" (*„Anschauung"*) of the identity which is always an approximation. *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, p. 160.

[12] See In *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, „Die Sprache als allgemeines Bezeichnungssystem" pp. 372–378.

According to Schleiermacher, meaning and being are coordinated through the *„self"*, whose elements include a principle of universal subjectivity (the „I" as source of intellectual functions of the self), a principle of particular personality (this particular one here as source of organic functions of sensation and emotion), and a unifying principle of individuality (a connection and connecting between universal and particular elements). The individuality of the self appears precisely through the activity of connecting percepts and thoughts obtained through the organic and intellectual functions, as well as through the activity of articulating said connections in language. The connecting occurs at various levels: It occurs subjectively in immediate self-consciousness as *„Gefühl"*, in pre-conceptual image-consciousness as *„Anschauung"*, in reflective consciousness in the linguistic *„Urteil"*, and in reflexive consciousness in the *„Dialektik"*, or conversation about conversation as the *„Darlegung der Grundsätze für eine kunstgemäße Gesprächsführung in Gebiet des reinen Denkens"*. At all levels, howevwr, the activity of connecting and distinguishing is always an individualizing activity, according to Schleiermacher.

Schleiermacher holds that in „immediate self-consciousness", humans do have an original „intuition" of the primordial principle of the unifying activity, an intuition which makes possible any actual cognitive syntheses.[13] Concerning this primordial intuition, Schleiermacher claims less than the absolute idealist position of Fichte or Hegel, for Schleiermacher claims that the intuition of the self is not purely an intellectual intuition, self-produced in thought when thought thinks itself, as it is for Fichte and Hegel. But Schleiermacher's notion of intuition claims more than Kant's critical philosophy, for the intuition of the self is not merely an idea of pure reason. Schleiermacher's notion of intuition is determined by the principle of individuality, the principle of the unity of the intelligible and the sensible, as this unity appears to the self through the unifying unity of the intellectual and organic functions of reason. Intuition for Schleiermacher refers to the capacity of language to bring the universality of thought and the particularity of reality into a knowable individual unity.[14] Because words are themselves unities of thought and thing, words which disclose the synthesizing power of words enable the intuition of the self. Words about words disclose something

[13] *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, pp. 286–294.

[14] This assertion is admittedly an interpretation of Schleiermacher which exceeds the letter of his text but which is, I should argue, an accurate inference from the structure of his thought. Schleiermacher is explicit in claiming two things: First, *perceiving* is that thinking in which the organic function is predominant and the intellectual only accompanies, *thinking* in the narrow sense is that thinking in which the intellectual function dominates and the organic function only accompanies, and *intuition* is that thinking in which both stand in equilibrium (*Dialektik*, p. 157). Second, language has both perceptual and conceptual components; language engages both the organic and intellectual functions (p. 140–141). Thus, it is clear that language makes possible intuition; intuition refers to the capacity of language to bring the universality of thought together with the particularity of perception into a knowable individual unity.

non-arbitrary about the ground of all finite knowing, i.e., the unity of the self, for the word and the self share the structure of individually combining intellectual and sensible elements. Nonetheless, the self as finite ground of knowing remains transcendent in the domain of knowledge to the participants in actual conversations under conditions of time and space.

According to Schleiermacher, to be a human self means *in principle* to be able to mediate as an individual between particular and universal elements in the *Ineinander* of the organic and intellectual functions of the self. Schleiermacher was intensely aware, however, that *in practice* human selves fail to mediate correctly between universal and particular elements. In practice, human beings tend to be pulled either toward the particularities of life as given or toward the universal forms of thought. Embodiment and recognition of the unifying unity in individual beings, meanings, and selves, is rare in actual human life and history. In practice, it is more common to be torn by the conflict between opposites and to lose sight of the unifying principle as the ground of both identity and difference, than it is to testify in thought and deed to the unifying but on knowable ground.

The dispute between the „postmodernists", who would „escape subjectivity" in favor of the dissemination of the self among particular signs, and the „modernists", who would submit everything to the universal design of subjectivity, provides an instance of such one-sidedness at each extreme. As an *element* of the self, the principle of universal subjectivity is ineluctable and inescapable; thus the humiliation of the subject by the postmodernist is self-destructive. As *an* element of the self, the principle of universal subjectivity is always already decentered as part of a larger structure; thus the exaltation of the subject by the modernist is self-glorifying. The dispute concerning the status of the subject can be resolved by referring each one-sided construal of the self to the ontological structure grounding the self. Schleiermacher articulates that structure through his principle of individuality, while resisting the temptation to reduce the self either to the universal or to the particular element. Schleiermacher hits the mean between extremes represented by the „modern" and „postmodern". How did he do it?

By articulating the structure of the self as individual, Schleiermacher systematically brought together what we might call the modern *philosophical* conception of the subject-centered self with an independent modern *religious* conception of the self. To epitomize the „modern philosophical conception of the self", I refer to its highpoint: the conception of the self-positing self developed by Fichte. According to Fichte, the ground of all knowing is the being of a subject that posits itself unconditionally as being self-posited. Knowing is a judgment that a perceptible object is the same as a determinable thought. Unconditional positing precedes the division in the self between a passive moment of receptivity and an active moment of determining, a division which is brought together in the judgment connecting and distinguishing subject and predicate. Positing is the unconditional, original, and transcendental occurence which is both active

and passive. It is for Fichte the being of the I: the I is an act of unconditional self-positing which is also the accomplished deed of having been self-posited. The self as I posits itself unconditionally through itself, and it exists (*is* there) as something posited through its positing of itself. The self knows about knowing because the self is always already a unity of positing (thinking, noumenal concept) and something posited (being, phenomenal appearance).[15] It is this conception of the self which has drawn criticism from the postmoderns for its pretension and assertiveness in constituting the self as self-positing.

By the „modern religious conception of the self", I refer especially to Luther's paradigmatic view that the self is defined not by its transcendental activity of positing but rather by its reply to the summons of a word originating elsewhere.[16] For Luther, when confronting the Word of God as preached word, the self is isolated in the singularity of its having to respond to divine judgment. Exposed as the singular one responsible for its own particular thoughts and actions in violation of divine law, the guilty conscience cannot hide behind universals and general cases. The attack of conscience mediated through the word is not relieved by appealing to general rules, but is suffered as a singular judgment of eternal damnation as law and a singular judgment of divine forgiveness as gospel. Schleiermacher was able to incorporate this religious element, no longer as empirical and biographical event, but as a transcendental structure making possible such events, into a complex structure constituted by the principle of individuality. His grafting of the religious element into the structure of the self philosophically conceived accomplished the decentering of the self-positing self of modern philosophy. How so?

Schleiermacher correctly saw that the subject is a necessary but not sufficient grounding element for the self: the self is always already positing itself through the subject, but it is positing itself as having been posited as self-positing by a word it receives from another.[17] Schleiermacher could see that there is no possible escape from the pure principle of subjectivity, because we trace the very notion of „escape" as one of our representations back to the subject originating point of thinking. Schleiermacher could also see, however, that the self is not posited in its subjectivity by itself as subject; it is so determined unconditionally by another, namely, the unconditional ground of

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[15] See especially Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Versuch einer neuen Darstellung der Wissenschaftslehre* (1797/98), revised edition by Peter Baumanns, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1975), pp. 101–113.

[16] I am indebted for this presentation of Luther to Robert P. Scharlemann, *The Reason of Following: Christology and the Ecstatic I* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 7.

[17] For a detailed interpretation of Schleiermacher's *Dialektik* along these lines, see Thomas Lehnerer, *Die Kunsttheorie Friedrich Schleiermachers* (Stuttgart: Ernst Klett Verlag, 1987), especially the chapter entitled *„Absolutes Abhängigkeitsgefühl – der Grund des Gesamtsystems"*, pp. 63–89.

thinking and being – the God of the *Dialektik*, which Schleiermacher also calls *„ein Urwissen"*.[18]

The God of the *Dialektik* functions for Scheiermacher as a regulative idea for thinking and willing in the Kantian sense: it serves to unify human knowledge and to confine it to possible experience. At the same time, however, in a more Platonic than Kantian sense, this „transcendent ground" functions as a symbol of the highest good, which is sought for and desired by all intentional activities as their ultimate source and goal. All dialogue and dispute desire ultimately to know the transcendent ground of their possibility, but the desire to know the ground can never be satisfied under conditions of space and time.[19] As transcendent ground of the identity of thinking and being in knowing, it cannot itself be known. Knowing is constituted by the mediations between the ideal and the real, which stem from the distinct intellectual and organic functions of human existence respectively. In the nature of the case, the ground of these oppositions cannot enter human knowing strictly speaking. Why not?

According to Schleiermacher pure thinking, or thinking about thinking, yields absolute knowledge of the ground of thinking and being only for God, not for human beings. Absolute knowledge, or knowledge of the absolute ground, is not impossible in principle, but it is impossible in practice for humans. The reason is that all human attempts to think the unity of thinking and being are undertaken in the mode of „speaking thinking". Under conditions of time and space, all thinking occurs through the unifying unity of the self as individual. All thinking thus occurs as a mediated unity between a universal element – the universal forms of thought as the production of the intellectual function – and a particular element – the auditory or visible linguistic signs as the production of the organic function. Sense and sign, thought and word, have an unsurpassable identity as well as difference. Thought can always be abstracted from a determinate linguistic sign, but never completely. Human thinking always occurs in the individualizing medium of language.[20]

The *„Sprachgebundenheit des Denkens"* means that there is always an element within the dynamics of immediate self-consciousness that systematically escapes reduction to a final grounding in a self-positing-itself through its intellectual function.[21] This element is the word that comes from elsewhere and is received in its materiality

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[18] *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, p. 115, p. 117.

[19] *Dialektik*, pp. 270–275, and pp. 297–307.

[20] See *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik, p. 127, where Schleiermacher writes, „Rede und Denken stehen also in einer festen Verbindung, sind eigentlich identisch. Das Denken ist nicht ohne Rede möglich, und diese ist die Bedingung der Vollendung des Denkens"*.

[21] *„Die Sprachgebundenheit des Denkens"* is Karl Pohl's expression. See Pohl's article cited in note 5 above.

through the organic function. By virtue of the *„Sprachgebundenheit des Denkens"*, immediate self-consciousness is always individual: the subject of the philosophical conception of the self is ineluctably there, but it is decentered through the irreducibly organic and particular features of language. In its orientation toward the transcendent ground, immediate self-consciousness includes a feeling of the self's universal dependence on the world as the network of linguistic interrelations out of which the self posits itself. It also includes a feeling of the self's absolute dependence in the awareness that the structure of the self as a unified finite individual, including both philosophical and religious elements of positing and not-positing, must be referred to a source that is neither self nor world, a Whence named „God".[22]

The point I want to make is that for Schleiermacher language is the medium in which the self both intuits itself in immediate self-consciousness as an individual and intuits the absolute ground. Schleiermacher's conception of self-consciousness retains the principle of subjectivity but decenters it through the accompanying consciousness that the self is always open to and affected by an irreducible givenness of the word; the inexpungeable reference to language means for the self that it is not the author of its own unity. Expressing Schleiermacher's intent in words other than his, let me now reflect on his doctrines of self and God, as structured through the principle of individuality.

The being of language as presenting meaning, and the being of the self as positing being, mirror each other. Language is the medium of the self's essential activity of mediating between the intellectual and organic functions. The word connects the abstract thought, structured through the intellectual function, with the concrete percept, given through organic impressions. Language as a system of signs makes the synthesis between thought and percept possible, because language itself is both thought and thing. Language embodies thought in its sound and sight (and so is more than abstract thinking), yet at the same time language interprets being (and thus is more than concrete percept). As such, language can be the mediator of thinking and being, subjectivity and objectivity.

To be a self is likewise to be both a connecting activity and embodied connection between universal subjectivity and particular personality. We enact the being of language by engaging in the back and forth alternation of thinking and willing in dispute and dialogue. The being of the self appears in immediate self-consciousness, i.e., one's understanding the unity in difference of thought and word. The mirror relation

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[22] For an analysis of these key terms from *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, pp. 286–294, See Hans-Richard Reuter, *Die Einheit der Dialektik Friedrich Schleiermachers: Eine systematische Interpretation* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1979), pp. 216–247.

between self and language can be put as follows: Language reveals the being of the self; the self reveals the being of language.

The relations between language and self reveal something about the being of God as well. Immediate self-consciousness, in which the self intuits itself as a „speaking thinking", presents us with an „analogy with the transcendent ground".[23] If we understand the self to be a finite unity of opposites, we must think the being of God as the final unconditioned unity of thinking and being, the ideal and the real. All conditioned opposites are one in God: thinking and willing, thinking and speaking, meaning and being. If God's unity is truly a unity of the ideal and the real, and not merely an ideal unity, then God's being must also be imagined as an individual unity between universal and particular elements. We must think God's being as the absolute unity between the *ideal* unity of thinking and being and human immediate self-consciousness as *real* unity of thinking and being. God is God as the unity of the ideal of God and the real being of the human self in immediate self-consciousness.

Is that an empty formula, or can we give it substance by reference to reading scripture? Let me take three experimental steps to fill out the empty formula with real content. First step: let us acknowledge that certain fundamental words have the individualizing capacity to present abstract thoughts concretely in the act of human mediation. These are words which can disclose the being of the self through the being of language. Ordinarily words play a double role in distinct moments of time: words first convey a meaning and then the meaning refers to reality outside the words. But there are some words which both carry intelligible meaning and present the reality to which they refer through themselves. The word „I" precisely as word has this capacity: when uttered and heard or written and read, the word „I" both enables the thought of universal subjectivity and simultaneously presents its reference in a particular time and space. In reading or hearing the sentence „I am I", the mind thinks the universal origin point of representations, forms a general image of a self, connects that image with a particular person here and now (real or imagined).[24] Transcendentally presupposed by that activity and accompanying it empirically is an individualized immediate self-consciousness in Schleiermacher's sense. Similar movements of understanding can be charted out with regard to the words „world" and „God". Each of these fundamental expressions corroborates Schleiermacher's individuality claim from the hermeneutical standpoint of the understanding of how we understand meaning in words.

The words „I", „God", and „world", demonstrate a certain kind of double agency that is the result of the linguisticality of all thinking. They show that I do not

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[23] *Friedrich Schleiermachers Dialektik*, p. 289.

[24] Robert P. Scharlemann has developed this point about the instantiating power of „I" and „God" in many of his writings. See for example *The Being of God*, p. 169–177.

merely posit myself through the I, but am posited as self-positing through the word „I", which comes from another in the sense that is given to me in historical particularity. In saying „I", I, the subject as principle of thinking, posits itself as thinking and posits itself as posited in the thought. But as the activity of thinking takes individual embodiment through the word „I", the word constrains the thinking in certain ways. For example, it makes a difference to the thought-content and import whether the expression is uttered in English („Here I am"), French *(„C'est moi")*, or German *(„Ich bin da")*. „I" think, and at the same time the word guides and limits my thinking. In my „speaking thinking", the word in its historical particularity also „thinks" as a kind of second agent of thinking: the word itself individualizes thinking. The strict content of the universal thought combines with a particular element in the medium of an individual language through which thinking occurs. *„Die Sprachgebundenheit des Denkens"* means that I think and the word thinks through me.

The second step in filling out the formula that God is the unity of the idea of God and the real being of the human self is as follows. Given the structural analogy between the being of the self and the being of language, even to the point just made in which we speak by analogy about a kind of double agency in „speaking thinking", let us attempt the following thought-experiment.

Typically, when someone hears or reads a word which he or she did not utter or write, that word addresses one through the voice of a „thou". „You" speak or write to „me". Imagine, however,that a word which appears in the form of a text through the particular voice of some other agent (for example, Luke), were not to strike me as the voice of another agent but rather as my own voice calling to me from the text. What would be the case here? In such a case, the principle of universal subjectivity would combine with the principle of particular personality, but in such a way that the resulting individual voice would not be heard as other than my own. The two „agents" – subject and word – would be combined so that I encounter my own I, not as abstract idea but as another individual self. The other voice would be heard as „mine" in spite of the fact that the differentiating features of individuality (particular expressions of voice and everything that makes a „you" different from „me") would not eliminated. While not eliminated, differentiating features would be transcended by reference to a disclosure through the other voice of what it *means* to be an individual.

In other words, in encountering and thinking through words which lead one to think individually and for oneself what it means in truth to be the individual one is, the words of the other might be read or heard as one's own words. Precisely in initiating this thought, as my thought, the I of the other would be encountered in this sense as not other than my I. The subject would overcome its apparent separateness in the composite structure of individuality and encounter its own universality in and through the concrete particularity of voice. In this way, the separate voice of the text could be

understood as one's own voice outside. Rather than encountering the „thou" through the text, which leads to the affirmation „I respect you as other", one would encounter one's own „I" through the text, which leads to the affirmation „I am you, you are my I, through you I am I.[25]

The third step focuses on reading scripture: Let us suppose that the subject matter of scripture is God. Scripture is scripture because its myths, narratives, symbols, metaphors and the like, are disclosive of God's being, as we have it in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. The scripture presents the being of God as like what happens in the Parable; the Kingdom of God (not any earthly kingdom) happens in these events.

If we focus not merely on the events recorded in the parable, but on the event of *reading* the words in which these events are recorded, the following can happen: I could read the story of the Prodigal Son and think of myself as so reading the words of another. However, it could occur in the act of reading, that the words of the story begin to read me; the voice of the text appears as my own voice thinking through me in addressing me. If „I" as reader and „I" as voice of text are so united, I could find myself freely listening, not to another, but to myself as I could be, should be, and essentially am. Through Luke's parable, I could see that my own individualizing of „I am I" has been a squandering and a waste, but is not unrecoverable. I could receive from myself the possibility of correcting myself and an invitation to return to who I am. This could happen through the agency of words, heard as coming from me and yet from outside me, through words I did not utter and yet did. I come to realize that to return to myself is something I can do now, and in fact have already done, precisely in hearing the voice of the text a my own. In such a case the subject of the text has exposed my world, overturned it, and given me a new understanding through words.[26]

If such a case were possible, and I think it is, in reflecting on the event of reading scripture as a parable of God's being, I would claim that here in the happening of such a conversion through the unity of the double agency of thought and word, God *is*. Divinity happens, *God is God*, in the recovery of the „I am" through its identity with the „I am" of the text. Why? God is the absolute unity of thinking and being. In the encounter with the „I" of the text as my own „I", the reader intuits a unity of thinking and being. Something which eludes my thinking as such is given to me in the event of self-recognition through a conjunction of thought and word. This possibility extends and

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[25] Robert P.Scharlemann develops a theory of acoluthetic reason, a form of reason with equivalent standing to the theoretical, practical, and aesthetic forms. Acoluthetic reason is reflection on the relation of ecstasis: „The 'I' of which one is otherwise aware only inwardly and as different from the world and everything in it is now presented not as 'you' or an it but as *ego extra me*." See *Reason of Following*, p. 116.

[26] These remarks have their grounding in the acoluthetic form of reason mentioned in note 25 and articulated in Robert P.Scharlemann, *The Reason of Following*.

fills out the analogy Schleiermacher spoke of between the intuition of the self and the intuition of God. God is being God in the unity of self-recognition amidst the difference of self and other.

My paper was addressed to the postmodern prodigal sons and daughters of hermeneutics, who have fled the home of meaning in order to seek a fortune elsewhere. I have attempted here to sketch out a possibility to enable their return by showing how Schleiermacher's conception of the self as individual has already decentered the subject within the structure of the self. To comprehend again the first principles of comprehension removes the need for escape from subjectivity, while also showing the futility of such escape. But what about those who have not forsworn their father's home but have remained loyal to the subject within the structure of the individual as home of meaning? Is too much attention paid to postmodern criticism, too much effort spent to uncover the contradiction between what the postmoderns do in fact and what they must hold in principle? Should we not be about the business of applying first principles rather than concerning ourselves with the claims of those who would „escape subjectivity"?

Somehow, I can hear Schleiermacher's reassuring voice in the background of such a possibility, explaining to his elder sons and daughters why they hear music and dancing accompanying the return of the prodigal son: „Son, Daughter, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. It is fitting to make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead, and is now alive; he was lost, and is found".

STEVEN KEPNES

Martin Buber's Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics

> To Man the world is twofold, in accordance with his twofold attitude.
> The attitude of man is twofold is accordance with the twofold nature of the primary words which he speaks... The one primary word is the combination I-Thou.
> The other primary word is the combination I-It.[1]

Thus Martin Buber's book *Ich und Du* [1923] begins. Two basic attitudes, two modes of language, two ways of life are delineated. The I-Thou mode addresses the whole of a being, the I-It only a part. I-It objectifies, analyzes, categorizes, establishes differences. I-Thou draws relations between subjects, seeks the common ground, draws out the total gestalt and affords a glimpse of the divine, the „Eternal thou". Most scholars of Martin Buber have used his philosophy of I-thou to talk of the necessary prerequisites for genuine dialogue and ethical relations between persons. Some have also used his philosophy to speak of human relations to the divine and others to the natural order. But in *Ich und Du* Buber delineates another application of the philosophy of I-Thou, an application that has important implications for the way in which we approach literary works. For Buber tells us that the I-Thou attitude must penetrate not only our relations with fellow humans, with animals and the divine, but with works of art, what he calls *„geistige Wesenheiten"*.[2]

What I want to suggest today is that the philosophy of I-Thou provided Buber with a hermeneutic to approach all *geistige Wesenheiten* from plastic to written arts, secular to sacred arts. Most specifically I want to argue that the philosophy of I-Thou provided Buber with philosophy to read, translate, and interpret the Hebrew Bible, what the Jews refer to as *Tanakh*. This hermeneutic, at once literary and theological, helped Buber to develop extreme sensitivity to the Hebrew Bible. Approaching the text as „Thou" required Buber to see it as a whole gestalt and not a series separate and unrelated literary strands or historical documents. Approaching the Tanakh as Thou heightened Buber's appreciation for the particularities of Hebrew language and biblical rhetoric. What is somewhat ironic about this move to biblical language and rhetoric, however, is that it required Buber to develop cartain techniques and methods of translation and interpretation that seem to contradict the meditative attitude of I-Thou. Indeed what Buber sems to come to realize is that in order to preserve the biblical text

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[1] Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. R. G. Smith (New York: Scribner's, 1958), p. 3. All references to I and Thou will be taken from this translation unless otherwise noted.

[2] Martin Buber, Ich und Du [1923] (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1983), p. 12.

as Thou certain „scientific" methodologies from the realm of the I-it must be employed. What I conclude from this is that a contemporary biblical hermeneutic requires a mixed discourse, an interpretive tool which includes both the techniques of I-It and the attitude of I-Thou.

Among leading philosophers of interpretation today it is Paul Ricoeur that has most eloquently argued for the hermeneutical imperative of a mixed discourse. To make his argument Ricoeur challanges the romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher, Dilthey and the Heideggerian hermeneutics of Gadamer. What I will try to show is that Buber's attempt to include technical methods of interpretation in his biblical hermeneutic foreshadows Ricoeur's argument with Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Gadamer and, in my view, further supports Ricoeur's position. If contemporary biblical hermeneutics is to help us to most fully appreciate the Bible it must employ a large array of methods which includes both I-it and I-Thou modes.[3]

Buber's Dialogic Aesthetics

In the aesthetics in *I and Thou* we can clearly see the conceptual underpinnings of a hermeneutical philosophy. In the beginning of *I and Thou,* Buber develops a view of the human relation to all creative works. Buber refers to creative works in his discussion of the three „spheres in which the word of relation arises".[4] These three spheres are nature, humanity, and *geistige Wesenheiten.* This later term is translated as „spiritual beings" by Kaufmann and Smith but a better translation is offered by Robert Wood - „forms of the spirit" - and Buber, himself, suggests, „spirit in phenomenal forms".[5] Buber associates the term with human creative activities - art, language, knowledge, and action - of which art is the „prime analogate".[6]

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[3] For a more extensive discussion of Buber's biblical hermeneutics in the context of his general hermeneutical philosophy see my *The Text as Thou: Buber's Dialogical Hermeneutics and Narrative Theology* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1992).

[4] *I and Thou,* p. 6.

[5] From a letter of Buber to Ronald Smith which Smith reported in his *Martin Buber* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1967), p. 16, n. 19. For another good discussion of how to translate the term, *geistige Wesenheiten,* see Robert Wood, *Martin Buber's Ontology* (Evanston ILL: Northwestern University, 1969). p. 43 and note 38.

[6] The expression, „prime analogate", is Wood's, *Ontology,* p. 50. Buber's first mention of *geistige Wesenheiten* in *I and Thou* refers to „forming, thinking, acting" (p. 6). His next reference is to „language, art, and action" (p. 39), which is followed by paragraphs on knowledge, art, and action (p. 40-42). The discussions of art seem primary because it is out of them that Buber develops most fully his notion of a form of spirit that has become concrete.

For Buber, in *I and Thou,* art is presented as the expression, not of a human experience but of a relationship between an individual and a suggestive artistic form, *Gestalt.*

> This is the eternal source of art: a man is faced by a form which desires to be made through him into a work. This form is no offspring of his soul, but is an appearance which steps up to it and demands of it the effective power.[7]

Buber makes the crucial point, however, in *I and Thou,* that the production of a work of art, the fashioning into relief of the world, reqires a „restriction" of endless possibility.[8] In the language of I-Thou, the artist turns the limitless Thou into a thing, an object. The artist „leads the form across – into the world of *It*".[9] Thus the work can be carried about, categorized and viewed by others.

But the work as „It" can be brought to life as Thou again. Here we can see the grounds for a dialogic hermeneutic in Buber's work. A form of spirit, which ostensibly is an „It„ can be brought to life again if the form is approached by a viewer with the attitude of I-Thou. I quote from two different places in *I and Thou.*

> The work produced is a thing among things, able to be experienced and described as a sum of qualities. But from time to time it can face the receptive beholder [*empfangend Schauender*] in its whole emodied form.

> Again and again that which has the status of object must blaze up into presentness and enter the elemental state from which it came, to be looked on and lived in the present by men.[10]

In these quotations, we have the rudiments of Buber's dialogical hermeneutic philosophy. First we have the realization that a *geistige Wesenheit,* a work of art or form of spirit, although an *It,* can „blaze up into presentness", into the status of a Thou, again. The work of art which was produced by an I-Thou relationship between an artist and a sensed form can become a Thou again through a new I-Thou relationship. To properly interpret the work, the interpreter must take the attitude of a „receptive beholder" who finds him or herself „bodily confronted" by the work. Louis Hammer, in his remarks on the relevance of Buber to contemporary aesthetics, suggests that this attitude of receptiveness requires some restraint on the part of the interpreter. „The

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[7] *I and Thou,* p. 9-10.

[8] *I and Thou,* p. 10.

[9] *Ibid.*

[10] *Ibid. pp. 10,40.*

critic must exercise restraint, he must cause the work to step forward, not obstruct it by his own interpretive constructions".[11] Encountering a form of spirit of as a „Thou", we find ourselves encountered. The work addresses us, confronts us, says something that „enters our life".[12] The work, as „Thou", has a „reality character".[13] It discloses a truth that forms our relation to truth.[14] Encountering a work as a „Thou" one respects the integrity of the work. Hammer argues that Buber's notion of the interpretation of a work of art involves an encounter with „other being". To have interpreted „a work of art is to have reached out and encountered other being by giving oneself over to form within the spheres of sight or sound or human speech".[15] Here, we can begin to understand Buber's use of the curious term, *„Wesenheit"*, to refer to a work of art or form of spirit. To the extent that the work „blazes up" and becomes a Thou, it is capable of addressing another and appears as a *Wesen,* a being, addressing its viewer or reader. One cannot remain passive in facing a form of spirit but must become active. In clarifying the I-Thou relationship with *geistige Wesenheiten,* Buber states:

> The You (Thou) encounters me. But I enter into a direct relationship to it. Thus the relationship is election and electing, passive and active at once.[16]

An I-Thou relationship with a form of spirit engages us in a conversation. Maurice Friedman states that the interpretations of these works „like the I-Thou relationship with nature are modified forms of dialogue".[17] Interpreting a form of spirit requires us to face the work as we face another being. We open our senses to it, to its particularities and to its total gestalt. We allow it to move us, to confront us, to speak to us. We try to perceive its special message and disclosure of reality. And we also

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[11] Louis Hammer, „The Relevance of Buber to Aesthetics", P. Schilpp and M. Friedman eds. *The Philosophy of Martin Buber* (La Salle ILL: Open Court, 1967), p. 627. Also in *Martin Buber: Philosophen des XX. Jahrhunderts.* P. Schilpp and M. Friedman eds. (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1963).

[12] Martin Buber, „Dialogue", *„Between Man and Man,* trans. R. G. Smith (New York: Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 9. Original German „Zwiesprache", *Die Kreatur,* III/3 (1929), 201-222. Also in Buber, - *Werke I Erster Band: Schriften zur Philosophie* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1962).

[13] Buber, „Man and His Image-Work", The *Knowledge of Man* ed. M. Friedmann, trans. M. Friedman and R. G. Smith (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. 150. For the original German see *„Der Mensch und sein Gebild"* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1955) also in Buber, *Werke I.*

[14] Buber's notion of the „reality" and „truth" which art discloses has some affinities with Heideggerian aesthetics and its „disclosure model" for truth. See Heidegger „The Origin of the Work of Art," *Poetry, Language, Thought,* trans. A. Hofstadter (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1971). Also *Martin Heidegger and the Question of Literature,* ed. W. Spanos (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1979).

[15] Hammer, „Relevance", p. 614.

[16] Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Scribner's, 1970), p. 62.

[17] Maurice Friedman, „Introductory Essay", in Martin Buber, *The Knowledge of Man,* p. 53.

respond to it. We present our reactions, we mirror-back our reading and look to see if the work confirms it.[18]

In his ground breaking work, *Wahrheit und Methode, Truth and Method,* first published in Germany in 1960. The contemporary hermeneutical philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer gives us a very helpful model to conceptualize the dialogic hermeneutical method. Gadamer suggests that the process which takes place between the interpreter and the text can be appreciated by considering the dynamics of play.[19] In a game truly played, the players relinquish some of their control. The players are taken over by the game in such a way that they live in the challanges, the ups and downs, the back and forth movements of the game.

> Play obviously represents an order in which the to and fro motion of play follows of itself. It is part of play that the movement is not only without goal or purpose but also without effort. It happens, as it were, by itself.... The structure of play absorbs the player into itself, and thus takes from him the burden of the initiative.[20]

Gadamer asserts that the proper subject of play is not the player but „instead, the game itself". Thus „all playing is a being played".[21] When one reads a good text attentively one is similarly overtaken by it. The subject matter is neither the author nor the reader but, properly, it is the content of the text, the truth of the text, which enthralls, challenges and educates the reader. Gadamer asserts that the interpreter must „subordinate" him or herself to „the text's claim to dominate our minds".[22] And the text has this claim because, as Gadamer says, without quoting Buber, „it expresses itself like a „Thou"[!][23]

In his dialogic hermeneutics Gadamer directly addresses the issue of the efficacy of techical methods of interpretation. Gadamer argues that technical methods,

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[18] We can use Donald Berry's analysis of how it is we can have a „mutual" I-Thou relation with nature to explain the mutual relationship with a work of art. Berry suggests that we establish a notion of varying „degrees" or levels of mutuality. See Donald Berry, *Mutuality: The Vision of Martin Buber* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), ch. 1. The I-Thou relation I have with a tree is not the fully mutual relationship I have with my friend but there are aspects of give and take in the relationship that make it more than a relationship of objectivication or I-It. Similarly we could say that we do not have a fully mutual relationship with a work of art but there can be a give and take, a „dialogue" with the work when I approach it with the attitude of thou.

[19] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroads, 1982), pp. 91. ff. *Wahrheit und Methode* [1960] (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1965).

[20] *Ibid.*, *p. 94.*

[21] *Ibid.*, *p. 95.*

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 278.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 321.

like the attitude of I-It, block instead of open, avenues to understanding cultural products. Gadamer does not refer to Buber but he uses the language of I-Thou to clarify different hermeneutical relations to a text (or Gadamer generally uses the broader term „tradition").

Gadamer delineates three types of I-Thou relationships with texts. Two of these are not fully mutual and have the quality of what Buber calls the „I-It" relationship. In the first, we study a text as the scientist studies objects of nature, attempting to place it in categories which render it suitable for analysis. Here we are interested in the text only as an „instantiation of a general law".[24] Here the 'Thou' is treated as a mute „object", and the 'I' exercises a practiced neutrality refusing to be affected or involved in any way with it.[25] This is typified, for Gadamer, by a social scientific approach to a tradition or text.

In the second type of I-Thou relationship with a tradition or text the I is concerned with the Thou not as a type but as a historically unique entity. Yet the relationship is fundamentally one of „self-relatedness". The interpreter is not really open to the otherness, the „strangeness",[26] of the Thou and immediately seeks to understand the other in his or her own terms. Here, the goal is to „understand the other better than the other understands himself".[27] This is the approach, in Gadamer's view, of „historical consciousness" which is exemplified by the romantic hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Dilthey.

The third, authentic type of I-Thou relationship, is based on an initial „separation", and „temporal distance",[28] what Buber called „the primal setting at a distance",[29] which guarantees „an acceptance of [the] otherness"[30] of the Thou and prepares the way for genuine relationship. Gadamer asserts that the crucial thing in a I-Thou relationship with a text is to „experience the 'Thou', i. e. not to overlook his claim and to listen to what he has to say".[31] This requires a „fundamental sort of openness" which allows that the „criteria of our own knowledge" can be put into

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[24] *Ibid.*, p. 323.

[25] Cf. Buber, *I and Thou,* p. 4, and „Dialogue", p. 8 where Buber speaks of the objective way of perceiving which he calls „observing".

[26] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* p. 262.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 322.

[28] *Ibid.*, p. 262-3.

[29] Martin Buber, „Distance and relation", *The Knowledge of Man,* p. 60. „Urdistanz und Beziehung". *Studia Philosophica Jahrbuch der Schweizerischen Philosophischen Gesellschaft, Separatum* X (Basel: Verlag für Recht und Gesellschaft, 1950), 7-19. Also in Buber, *Werke I.*

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

[31] Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* p. 324.

question.[32] Gadamer asserts that this attitude allows the „truth" of a text to be disclosed. Here, following Heidegger, Gadamer intends a notion of truth as *aletheia,* or disclosure. „The presence of the being itself...as it presents itself" in an artistic work.[33]

What we thus find in Gadamer's hermeneutics is a strict interpretation of the separation of I-Thou and I-It spheres and the modes of interpretation that are peculiar to each. Following Kant's separation of the phenomenal world from the noumenal and Dilthey's separation of the *Geisteswissenschaften* from the *Naturwissenschaften,* the human sciences from the natural sciences, Gadamer sees an ontological gap between I-Thou and I-It hermeneutics. Dilthey puts the distinction in this way: natural science employs methods of causal explanation, *erklären,* and the human sciences employs the hermeneutics of understanding, *verstehen.* Following on this Gadamer argues that one blocks access to the truth that can be disclosed in a text by employing scientific explanatory methodologies.

Buber's Dialogical Biblical Hermeneutics

If we now turn to Martin Buber's methods of translating and interpreting the Hebrew Bible we can see the direct relevance of the issues surrounding the hermeneutical methods of explanation and understanding for biblical criticism. It is very clear from his remarks on the way in which the modern reader should interpret the biblical text that Buber sees his I-Thou model as the proper paradigm. Many of Buber's remarks on methods of translation and interpretation are found in his: *„Zu einer neuen Verdeutschung der Schrift",* „Toward a New German Translation of Scripture", a supplement to 1954 German translation of the Hebrew Bible which Buber began with Franz Rosenzweig in 1925 and finished after Rosenzweig's untimely death in 1929. In this supplement Buber describes the attitude which he hopes the reader will take toward the biblical text in ways which parallel his description of the attitude which the individual must take toward the „Thou" as geistige Wesenheit. This is the attitude of the patient waiter or *„empfangend Schauender",* „receptive beholder".[34]

> He, too, especielly when he makes the subject truly important to him, can open himself to the Bible and let himself be struck by its rays wherever they happen to strike him; he can wait without preconception and without reservation surrender himself, let himself be tested; he can take up, with all powers take up and await what will happen to him,

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[32] *Ibid.* , p. 325.

[33] *Ibid.* , p. 414, 443.

[34] Martin Buber, *„Ich und Du", Werke I,* p. 84.

> await whether or not a new uninhibitedness to the Bible sprouts up within him.[35]

Buber stresses the need for the biblical text to be approached as „unfamiliar", as „other". This is the prerequisite for seeing the biblical text as Thou.

> The „man of today"...must approach the scripture as if he had never seen it before; as if he had not had it presented to him in school and after that in the garb of „religious" and „scientific" certainties; as if he had not all his life experienced it as all kinds of illusory concepts and propositions which are based on those certainties; he must place himself anew before the book which has become new.[36]

When the Bible is approached as other even as „alien" readers can have fresh encounters with the text, encounters which, like all I-Thou encounters, will have transforming affects on them.

> He must place himself anew before the book which has become new, withhold nothing and allow what happens between it and himself to happen. He does not know which saying, which image from this source will seize and remold him, from where the spirit will rush in and penetrate him in order to embody itself anew in his life; but he is open.[37]

That the receptive attitude of I-Thou and the concomitant hope for a dialogue with the biblical text is a central element in Buber's biblical hermeneutics is certain. But how is the modern reader to come to regard the biblical text which has been made so familiar by its ubiquitous presence in Western cultural products, as other, as Thou? Here Buber has one simple answer: the reader must return to the original Hebrew text. For the Hebrew with its peculiar semantics and syntax is bound to appear to the Western reader as alien. But what if the reader does not know Hebrew, here he or she is offered a new translation. A German translation that attempts to bring the modern reader to the Hebrew text by mimicking Hebrew rhetoric and style.

In stark contrast to Buber's early Hasidic translations in which Buber strays far from the written texts, the Buber-Rosenzweig German translation of the Hebrew Bible

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[35] Martin Buber, „Zu einer neuen Verdeutschung der Schrift" [1954], Beilage, to *Die fünf Bücher der Weisung*, (Köln: Jakob Hegner, 1968), p. 2. This is a supplement to the 1954 and 1968 revised publication of the translation of the Pentateuch, which summarizes many of Buber's earlier essays on the translation from Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, *Die Schrift und Ihre Verdeutschung* (Berlin: Schocken, 1936). Most of these essays are also found in Martin Buber, *Werke* II *Schiften zur Bibel* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1964), pp. 847-871, and pp. 1093-1187 and some in Buber, *Darkho shel Mikra* [Hebrew] (Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1964), pp. 272-307, 344-59. All translations from this supplement are my own.

[36] Buber, *„Neue Verdeutschung"*, p. 4.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 2.

may be one of the most literal translations that was ever produced. Everett Fox points out that in the Buber-Rosenzweig translation „each man was taxed to the utmost (especielly Buber) in the effort to restrain poetic enthusiasm in favor of strict adherence to an existing text".[38]

Buber criticizes other translations of the Hebrew Bible – the Septuagint, the Latin of Jerome, the German of Martin Luther – for not proceeding from „the purpose of preserving the original character of the Bible".[39] Buber suggests that all these translations where executed with the desire of transmitting „a reliable foundation charter to a community": to the Jews of Hellenism, to the early Christian World, to faithful of the Reformation. The translators often altered the „brittle form" of the Hebrew to make it more comprehensible to its target community.[40] Buber is particularly critical of these translations for transforming the concrete „sense and sensuality" of the Hebrew vocabulary into abstract philosophical and theological terminology. These translations stand like „palimpsests",[41] writings which cover over the original Hebrew and prohibit access to it. Buber laments that the Hebrew has been „encrusted" not only by abstract theological terms and a desire to make the text amenable to certain communities, but also by aesthetic and literary concerns. In contrast to his early „romantic" and „aesthetic" translations of Hasidic tales, and in a direct challenge to his teacher Dilthey Buber tells us that in his Bible translation one will find no „aestheticizing".

> It would be a false, superfluous, questionable, late romantic infelicitousness if the translation were inspired by aesthetic or literary reflections; or if the choice of word were determined totally or even partially by taste.[42]

Buber allows that the translation be dictated solely by „the demands of the [Hebrew] text".[43] The translation must „proceed with the purpose of preserving the original character of the book in choice of word, sentence structure, and rhythmic arrangement".[44] Buber stresses the import of the *„Von wo aus"*, that through which the biblical message arises. For Buber, the biblical „content" cannot be separated from the „form".[45] Buber's translation is directed toward presenting the overall unity of the

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[38] Everett Fox, „Technical Aspects of the Translation of Genesis of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig". Brandeis University Dissertation (Waltham MA:, 1975), p. 6.

[39] Buber, *„Neue Verdeutschung"*., p. 6.

[40] *Ibid.*

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 5.

[42] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[45] Martin Buber, *Moses: The Revelation and the Covenant* [Hebrew 1945] (New York: Harper and Row, 1958), p. 9. Also in Buber, *Werke II.*

Bible. If the Bible is to be regarded as a „Thou" it must be seen as a unity. „The Bible demands to be read as one book".[46] Buber admits that there were various traditions and a variety of writers or schools that contributed to the writing of the Bible, but there was a final redaction of these writings and a canon was produced. Buber is thus primarily interested in translating the text „which has become a whole no matter out of how many and varied fragments it has grown".[47] But how is Buber to disclose this unity in the biblical text to his reader? Here Buber cannot only count on the attitude of I-Thou. To present the biblical text as a whole Buber has to develop a way of imitating the Hebrew literary techniques through which the Bible became whole – techniques such as assonance, alliteration, repetition of cadence and most importantly, repetition of words or roots of words. To do this Buber develops his most famous translation and hermeneutic principle and technique, the principle of the *Leitwort*, the theme word.[48]

Leitworte

Buber argues that *Leitworte* give the biblical text rhythm and accentuate meaning. They are the defining attribute of biblical rhetoric. Buber defines the term as „a word or word-root meaningfully repeated within a text, series of texts, or collection of texts".[49] His translation attempts to follow the biblical use of *Leitworte* by translating each Hebrew word or root consistently with one German word or root. Buber found that in doing this he not only was able to produce a more Hebrew sounding German but he also found a key to the meaning of biblical passages and sections. Thus the leading word technique became not only a principle for translation but also a principle of interpretation that was used to discern the meaning of the biblical text. Buber came to believe that it was through *Leitworte* that a unity of style and content could be found not only through the Torah, the first five books, but through the entire Tanakh. The leading word, in Buber's view, was the tool through which the last redactor forged a unity and established a canon for the Hebrew Bible.[50]

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[46] Martin Buber, *„Neue Verdeutschung"*, p. 13.

[47] *Ibid.*

[48] Benno Jacob and M. D. Casutto used Buber's principle of *Leitworte* extensively in their commentaries on the Hebrew Bible and attempted to discredit the documentary hypothesis and trace out a unity throughout the text by using *Leitworte.*

[49] Buber, *„Neue Verdeutschung"*, p. 15. and *Werke* II, p. 1131.

[50] *„Neue Verdeutschung"*, p. 13. Buber refers to the final redactor of the Hebrew Bible as „the consciousness of unity which constructed the great halls of the Bible out of handed down structures and fragments". Rosenzweig refers to this redactor with the reverential term *rabbenu, unser Lerner* – our rabbi, our teacher, *Ibid.*, p. 7.

Because the use of *Leitworte* is so pervasive throughout the Hebrew Bible examples can be found on every page. Take, for example the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11:1–9. The word, *„safah"*, „language", is repeated four times. The phrase, *kol haretz*, „all the earth", is repeated five times and the words and word stems *habah, banah, ir, patz*, (come, build, city, scatter) three times each. Despite the fact that German and English style would suggest that one not repeat the same words over and over again, Buber translates the words of the Tower of Babel story directly into German as they appear in the Hebrew. The repetition and mirror arrangement of the *Leitworte* not only gives the Babel tale a rhythm and unity of sound but also quickly brings the hearer to the central theme and meaning of the tale: There was one language over all the earth and the people said: „Come let us build a city, lest we be scattered". But precisely from the hubris of the thought that unity and domination could be built by human power alone, the people lost the unity and were scattered over all the earth.

Historical Criticism

Although Buber's unique contribution to biblical hermeneutics can be found in his *Leitwort* principle Buber did not eschew the leading biblical critical principle of his day, historical criticism. In the introduction to *The Kingship of God*, Buber tells us that his aim is to „establish anew, upon the basis of critical research, the thesis of early direct-theocratic tendency in Israel".[51] The „critical research" which Buber depends upon is philology, historical documents, and comparative analysis of kingship systems of the ancient Near East. Buber tells us that „the historical bias" of texts – its historical context, its audience, its original purposes are „fundamentally decisive"[52] to his method of analysis. Regarding the documentary hypothesis he does not believe one can clearly isolate and date sources J, E, P, D but he does believe that there are „trends of literature", „manners of manipulating traditional material", and that knowledge of these „traditions" can be very helpful in interpreting the Bible.[53]

In his later books, *Moses* and *The Prophetic Faith*, Buber further outlines his use of historical criticism. He tells us his aim is to unearth the „tradition which we may

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[51] Buber, *Kingship of God* [German, 1932. translated R. Scheimann (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), p. 15. *Königtum Gottes* in *Werke II.*

[52] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[53] *Ibid.* p. 17. Although Buber was often critical of the documentary hypothesis he regarded it as a given of modern biblical interpretation. However, he believed that the interpreter had to go beyond the fragmentation of the Bible which the documentary hypothesis caused and seek the hints of unity throughout a section or book of the Bible. See Martin Buber, „Herut", [1919] *On Judaism*, ed. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1972), p. 172. Also Buber, „Abraham the Seer", [1939] *On the Bible*, ed. N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken, 1982), p. 25. „Abraham der Seher", in *Werke II.*

regard legitimately as being near to the historical events".[54] His goal is to „penetrate beneath the layers of different redactions of tradition and their tendencies",[55] to „separate the early from the late here, and then to advance, as far as possible, from the reworking of tradition to what may be presumed to be tradition, orally preserved".[56] To these historical critical methodologies Buber adds the literary methodology of the theme-word so that he believes he is able to „treat...the Hebrew text in its formal constituents more seriously"[57] than most historical critics.

A good example of the way in which Buber complements historical criticism with the theme-word technique is found in the *Kingship of God.* The entire book is dedicated to proving the historicity of the Judges passage of Gideon 8:23, „I will not rule over you, neither shall my son rule over you: the Lord shall rule over you".[58] Protestant biblical scholars Budde, Moore, Gressman, and Wellhausen have suggested that this saying of Gideon's is „too lofty" for the period of the Judges; it does not correspond with the development of Israelite faith which at this time had not arrived at the point of conceptualizing such a potent God that could supplant the need for human rulership. What actually happened with Gideon, these critics argue, is that he did accept the offer for him to be king and this is confirmed by the statement of one of Gideon's son's, Abimelekh (9:2). Abimelekh who, in an effort to usurp the power of his brothers who were ruling after their, father, Gideon, says: „Which serves you better, that seventy men rule over you, all sons of Jerubbaal [Gideon], or that a single man rule over you? [i. e. me, Abimelekh]".[59]

Buber uses the theme-word technique show that 8:23 and 9:2 cannot be so easily severed. In both of these passages a Hebrew word, *„mashal",* the German, *„walten",* „to rule", which occurs only two other times in the entire book of Judges, occurs many times (three times in 8:23, two times in 9:2). This repetition not only prohibits the attempt to disconnect the passages but also provides a way to harmonize

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[54] Buber, *The Prophetic Faith* [Hebrew 1942] trans. from the German [1950] C. Witten-Davies (New York: Harper and Row, 1960), p. 6. *Der Glaube der Propheten, Werke II.*

[55] *Ibid.,* pp. 6–7.

[56] Buber, *Moses,* p. 8.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] *Nicht ich will über euch walten,*
nicht mein Sohn soll über euch walten.
Richter 8:23. *Bücher der Geschichte,* Verdeutscht von Martin Buber gemeinsam mit Franz Rosenzweig (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider 1985).

[59] *Was taugt euch besser,*
daß über euch siebzig Männer walten, alle Söhne Jerubbaals, oder daß einziger Mann über euch walte? Ibid. , Richter 9:2.] Thus according to the critics 8:23 is actually later than Judges 9:2.

their seemingly contradictory meanings. Buber notes that the root *malakh,* „to be king", is not used here, but, instead, *mashal,* is used which signifies the „factual possession of power" and not the dominion of a „ruler's office". Thus, Abimelekh is acknowledging that Gideon and his seventy sons had practical power but never assumed the office of king. Gideon and his sons ruled, i. e. exercised power, yet all the while knowing full well that God was ultimate king.

Buber complements this theme-word analysis with a comparative historical analysis reviewing the kingship systems of Babylon, Egypt and South Arabia to show that the germ of a notion of an „immediate, unmetaphorical, unlimitedly real theocracy" suggested by Gideon existed as his time and was not necessarily developed after him.[60]

Thus in summarizing Buber's biblical hermeneutic can say that though the I-Thou paradigm was essential to establish the proper attitude, added to or inserted within the I-Thou paradigm is a variety of technical operations and biblical critical methods. In an ironic turn away from the pure hermeneutic principles that appear in *I and Thou,* Buber appears to have become convinced that in order to insure an I-Thou relationship between the reader and the Bible, technique and method need not be eschewed, as a strict dialogical hermeneutical approach such as that of Gadamer would suggest. Buber seems to be convinced that, in the case of the Hebrew Bible, it is precisely techniques and methods that insure that the I-Thou relationship of the reader with the text is possible. Thus, what we find in Buber's biblical hermeneutics is a model for translation and interpretation that employs both the paradigm of I-Thou and select techniques and methods of explanation.

C. Buber's Biblical Hermeneutics and Contemporary Biblical Criticism

Given the recent interest in literary analysis and interpretation theory in academic circles in general and religious studies in particular, Buber's exegetical writings are receiving increasing attention. Edward Greenstein has shown that Buber's theme-word analysis continues to have relevance to contemporary biblical criticism. In reviewing five recent books which employ literary analyses of the Bible, Greenstein shows how all employ Buber's theme-word technique.[61] Michael Fishbane[62] and Harold Bloom[63] have also focused on Buber's literary sensibilities. Yet, though there

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[60] Buber, *Kingship of God,* ch. 3.

[61] Edward Greenstein, „Biblical Narratology", *Prooftexts* 1:2, (May, 1981), p. 202.

[62] Fishbane, „Martin Buber as an Interpreter of the Bible", pp. 184-195. and „Introduction" to Buber, *Moses* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1987). See also Fishbane, *Garments of Torah* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1989).

[63] Harold Bloom, „Introduction", Buber, *On the Bible.*

has been a tendency to concentrate on his literary techniques alone, Buber's adept ability to combine literary and historical analysis with dialogical hermeneutics also deserves attention. For it seems that we have arrived at a time in biblical studies where many are realizing that one type of method – be it source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, or literary criticism – is not adequate to the complex task of interpreting the Bible. There is a movement away from the use of one methodological approach or one kind of method toward the use of a plurality of methods – methods which have often been opposed to one another and considered mutually exclusive by their original progenitors.

Important Jewish and Christian interpreters have argued that the turn toward the literary dimension of the Bible is not hindered but aided by historical scholarship. Meir Sternberg has stated that compositional issues, dating of texts, and historical studies of ancient Near East „prove indispensable to literary study as such".[64] David Tracy has argued that, more than any other means, it is historical critical method that establishes a distance between modern readers and the biblical text and thus „preserves the otherness of the text", and allows for a true dialogue with the modern reader.[65]

One helpful way of framing contemporary debates on the use of critical methodologies in biblical criticism is by employing the terms from Dilthey's distinction between the *Geisteswissenschaften* and the *Naturwissenschaften* which I introduced earlier. In Dilthey's view the human sciences and natural sciences each utilize different types of methods: methods of *verstehen,* understanding, and *erklären,* explanation. The controversy in biblical hermeneutics surrounding use of critical methodologies represents a focal question in all of contemporary hermeneutic theory: to what extent do methods of *erklären* and methods of *verstehen* represent epistemologically and even ontologically opposed approaches to the interpretation of texts? In framing the controversy in terms of a larger debate on method we will be able to take advantage of the work of a figure who has, perhaps, thought most deeply about the estrangement of the sciences from the humanities, that figure is the French Philosopher, Paul Ricoeur.

Ricoeur has shown, in addressing the issue of the radical separation between the methods of *verstehen* and *erklären,* that though the methods are certainly different they can be shown to complement each other in the task of interpretation.[66] For example, we can think of a human conversation as a model for human communication. When two people understand one another, statement builds on statement and creative

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[64] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative,* (Bloomington: Indiana, 1987), p. 13.

[65] Robert Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible,* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 154.

[66] Paul Ricoeur, „Explanation and Understanding", *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur* (New York:Beacon, 1978), pp. 149–167. See also Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory* (Forth Worth TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), chap. 4.

dialogue rich with intuitive understanding ensues. Yet if one interlocutor suddenly does not understand the other then free conversation is stopped and the partner is asked for explanations, reasons, exact information, analysis. After this is done the free and creative dialogue can continue. Thus, in the example of conversation, explanation assists understanding. Similarly, when we read a literary text we find that an analysis of the structure of the plot, the rhetorical style of the writing, and the period in which it was written assists us in understanding the meaning in front of the text, the meaning for our life and for our relationship to our world.

To apply this to the biblical criticism we could say that questions about rhetoric and the historical status of certain texts need not be regarded as irrelevant to the hermeneutical task. Developing a „dialogue" with the text which opens to an inderstanding of the „meaning" and modern significance of the Bible can be aided by historical critical investigation. To take this further, we could say that there is no reason why historical critical methodology must be antithetical to a dialogic or a Gadamerian hermeneutical approach.

In his essay, „Explanation and Understanding", Ricoeur argues that „explanation *develops* understanding" and „understanding precedes, accompanies, closes, and thus *envelops* explanation".[67] Ricoeur argues that explanatory methods are especially important allies when we approach a phenomenon that is communicated, not directly, as in the model of conversion, but indirectly, through textual form. Here, where texts are our only form of communication, we need forms of explanation to help us to decipher the cultural codes that the text assumes and is written with. „This exteriorization into material marks, and this inscription in the codes of discourse, make not only possible but necessary the meditation of understanding by explanation".[68] Historical critical and rhetorical analysis can be of crucial importance in establishing the preunderstandings of the culture which produced a specific text. Without some information on these preunderstandings it is difficult to even begin a dialogue with a text.[69]

Historical critical methodology approaches texts and historical phenomenon as objects to be analyzed and categorized. The text as „object" cannot „address" a reader as subject. Gadamer, who develops a pure dialogical hermeneutics attempts to exclude explanatory methods from the hermeneutic process. Utilizing Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis* and *techne,* Gadamer argues that hermeneutics, as a form of *phronesis,* „must attain its true dignity and proper knowledge of itself by being liberated

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[67] Ricoeur, „Explanation and Understanding", p. 165.

[68] Ricoeur, „Explanation and Understanding", p. 153.

[69] See Bultmann, „The Problem of Hermeneutics", *New Testament and Mythology,* trans. and ed. S. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 86.

from history" and „the methodological ideal of the natural sciences".[70] For Gadamer, the „truth" which the human sciences seeks cannot be won by a „method", especielly a method whose goal is an atemporal objectivity. Yet, as Ricoeur has shown, explanatory methods can be of help to the tasks of understanding. For Ricoeur, explanatory methods must not be seen as obstacles but, rather, as aids to viewing the biblical text as „Thou". If we return to Buber's biblical hermeneutics we see that in order to approach an ancient text like the Hebrew Bible as Thou we, out of necessity, must turn to technical historical and literary methodologies. Although in *Ich und Du* Buber established a radical distinction between I-Thou and I-It modes his recognition of the complementary relationship between historical, literary, and dialogical hermeneutical approaches to the Bible represents an important step toward bridging the gap between I-Thou and I-It. Bridging this gap, which can be traced back through Dilthey to Kant to Descartes to Plato and which can be found whereever religions separate the sacred sphere from the profane, is a goal that I am confident many involved in contemporary hermeneutics share and regard not only as important to their work as scholars and teachers in the post-modern world but also as long overdue.

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[70] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 302-303. For Ricoeur's critical comments on Gadamer's attempts to exlude explanatory methods from the interpretation of texts see Ricoeur, „The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation", *Philosophy Today* 17 (Summer 1973), 129-130. Jürgen Habermas maintains that certain texts are „systematically distorted" by ideologies and they require critical explanatory theories, like those provided by Marx and Freud, if they are to be properly understood. Habermas, *Hermeneutik and Ideologiekritic* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971). See also the debates between Habermas and Gadamer in Continuum 8, (1970), 77-96, 123-28.

WERNER G. JEANROND

Biblical Criticism and Theology: Towards a New Biblical Theology

The recent contribution of David Tracy to theological hermeneutics has helped a countless theologians worldwide to rediscover the significance of hermeneutical thinking for their theological tasks and the benefit of participating in the global conversation on adequate methods of human understanding. Since Friedrich Schleiermacher reconnected theology and hermeneutics in a programmatic way nearly two centuries ago, no other theologian has advanced the understanding of the role of hermeneutics in theology as much as David Tracy.

In this article I propose to reconsider the relationship between biblical criticism and Christian theology and, with it, to show Tracy's decisive contribution to theological hermeneutics and the next step called for by his contribution. Recognizing the imperative under which his work places us is essential, for we are now at a juncture in history when once again both subdisciplines of Christian reflection – biblical criticism and Christian theology – may go their separate ways. It appears that hermeneutics, which originally emerged with the promise of bringing and keeping the two subdisciplines more closely together, may now promote a new divorce between both partners. How could that happen, and what can we do in order to avoid such a divorce?

I wish to examine these questions and make some suggestions towards a reconsideration of the function of hermeneutical thinking in Christian theology. I shall begin by discussing briefly some features of the development of modern hermeneutics. In the second section I shall review the importance of biblical criticism for the praxis of Christian faith. In the third and final section I shall examine the significance of David Tracy's and Friedrich Schleiermacher's contributions to our discussion of future options for the relationship between biblical and theological studies.

I. What Has Hermeneutics Done to Theology?

Early in the 1970s when I began my theological studies in Germany, my fellow students and I were very unhappy about the rigid division of labour in our theological faculties. In the biblical courses we learned how to master the texts of the Scriptures philologically and historically, and in our theological courses we were taught how to understand the development of Christian theology and its current state. There was really no official connection between these disciplines, and professors who dared to cross the lines between them he were considered traitors by some of their colleagues. Two centuries of hermeneutical thinking did not seem to have yet made a lasting impression on the organisation of theological thinking and theological education – at least in some of the Roman Catholic faculties of theology. Thus, when we then came into contact with

literary criticism, philosophical hermeneutics, and Friedrich Schleiermacher's theological method, we students felt that we had found the keys that would open the doors to a renewal of theological labour and to a more unified approach to the understanding of our particular religious tradition and its changing context. Howewer, two decades later I must conclude that the hermeneutical discussion in theology has also yielded news problems and divisions.

a) The Hermeneutical Imperative

First of all, there can be no doubt that we theologians have been enormously enriched by participating in the debate on adequate methods of text-interpretation. The recognition of the dialectical relationship between reader and text, the examination of textual genres of communication and their specific claims to attention, the rediscovery of Schleiermacher's grammatical and psychological modes of interpretation, the commitment to ideology critique, the awareness of a host of distorting factors in the process of reading, and the insights into our logocentric approach to texts and readers have challenged all interpreters to become more careful about their claims and to be more self-critical altogether. It would seem that the conditions of adequate reading of biblical, doctrinal and other texts have now been so thoroughly examined that Christian theologians could return to their other tasks, which include interpreting the Christian tradition anew for the faith praxis of new generations. Methodologically, theologians are now more realistic about and sufficiently aware of their interpretative possibilities and limitations. Theologians such as Bultmann, Ebeling and Ogden have celebrated this triumph of hermeneutics, and more recently Schillebeeckx, Geffré, Metz, Tracy, and Küng, have begun to explore the features of a new community of theological interpreters, who in turn would want to participate in the worldwide attempt at understanding one's own and anybody else's religious tradition.[1] And finally, the vision of a global understanding has emerged as the new hermeneutical paradise at the horizon of our methodological reflection. Not only can biblical scholars and theologians now work together: in fact, all well-meaning thinkers in the entire world have been encouraged to join the mutually critical effort of understanding one another and everybody's tradition.

Surely, hermeneutics has made the world better by preparing the ground for this worldwide conversation on the nature, the past and the future of our universe. To be sure, structuralist and poststructuralist thinking has not lastingly disturbed this picture. Rather, the discovery that the assumed centre of the universe – understood

[1] See my discussion of hermeneutics in *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance,* Studies in Literature and Religion (London: Macmillan, and New York: Crossroad, 1991).

either in terms of God or the interpreter himself or herself – was an illusion cherished uncritically by former generations of interpreters has enforced our conviction today that only a mutual and a mutually critical understanding of the many different and possibly even radically different centres can bring us more closely together. Radical pluralism thus not only is not an argument against hermeneutics but leads to an even stronger demand for more hermeneutics. The world, it seems, has turned hermeneutical, and the new moral maxim reads: Understand yourself and the other in such a way the method of your understanding could be adopted by everybody as the universal method of understanding everything and everybody.

This hermeneutical imperative has certainly many attractive features: It promises a more successful interfaith dialogue:[2] it invites all interpretative efforts to join forces; it represents a maturer version of individualist approach both to particular texts and traditions and to the universe as a whole; and, generally speaking, it incorporates the lasting concerns of all kinds of critical movements. Therefore, no one could seriously question the fine achievements of the hermeneutical tradition. Undoubtedly many theologians today know better what it means to understand, and they have made major advances in terms of actually „understanding" their respective tradition and even aspects of other traditions.

But is there not also a darker side to the present concern with hermeneutics in theology? Does not the concentrated effort at *understanding* everything lead to an oversubscription to certain reflective activities at the expense of others? Could it not be that the shift towards hermeneutics has led a number of theologians anew into the narrow confines of German idealism? By this charge I do not mean that Germans necessarily exercise a bad influence on theology, nor do I wish to suggest that the German idealist tradition is a bad development *in toto.* All I wish to say is that the overemphasis in that tradition on *understanding* may lead theologians away from some of their other important tasks.

Theology aims not only at understanding. As a speculative discipline – to use Schleiermacher's term – it also includes a reflection on the principles and strategies of Christian action in this world. Thus, what seems to be required most udgently is a sharper discussion of how these two tasks are related. In other words, how do the theory and praxis of reading the texts of our tradition and the theory and praxis of political action in this universe relate to each other in Christian theology? And how do biblical criticism and constructive theology relate to each other in terms of promoting

[2] See David Tracy's most recent book *Dialogue with the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain: Peeters, 1990)

such a theory of adequate Christian praxis?[3] That these are urgent questions for contemporary theology will be clear when we consider for a moment what has happened in some of the less hermeneutically minded areas of the present theological geography.

b) The Call for Praxis and the Rise of Fundamentalism

Latin American liberation theologians are not the only ones to call for a new approach both to the Bible and to theology in general. In view of the massive social and economical problems that people in the southern hemisphere have been facing for a long time, the traditional strands and methods of European and North American Christian theology have come under attack. The gap between a theology that understands all but does not promote concrete liberating action, on the one hand, and the more or less spontaneous awareness of Christians that the God of Israel and of Jesus Christ is a God who is involved in their daily struggles against poverty, exploration, oppression, and the various misuses of power, on the other, has grown so great that traditional European and North American theologies have lost most of their credibility in these parts of the world. A powerful exception is Dietrich Bonhoffer's political action and the surviving fragments of his theological reflection on political action in the world, which have contributed to the emergence of political theologies in the first an the this worlds. The arrival of hermeneutics in our theological faculties has, of course, further encouraged the discovery of systematic distortions in communication, the often hidden interests in the process of understanding, and the particular ideologies operative in our Christian discourse (biblical and postbiblical). But by stressing the need for proper methods of understanding, the hermeneutical concern has at times overshadowed the practical concern and has, as a result, mostly unconsciously led to the widespread illusion that once a phenomenon of the biblical tradition or any other literary tradition is understood, the intellectual goal has been achieved. Thus, on other aspect of speculative theology, namely the reflection upon possible responses to the reconstructed meanings of the biblical texts of any other literary text, has been pushed into the background, and the constructive or political task of theology has been neglected or left to those forces which so far have not undergone any form of hermeneutical purification.

While reader-response criticism in the northern hemispere has been concerned with the theoretical intricacies of reading texts, quite a different kind of reader-response praxis has emerged with regard to the biblical texts in all parts of the world, a phenomenon described in a rather wholesale fashion by the term „fundamentalism".

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[3] Of course, the biblical texts are and can be studies outside the framework of a theological approach. But Christian theology cannot fulfill its tasks without studying the Scriptures.

While we biblical hermeneuts strive to know all about understanding, our fundamentalist neighbours have responded already to the biblical texts in their own pragmatic, though uncritical way. This split between the critical insights of hermeneutically sophisticated theologians into their literary tradition and the uncritical application of biblical texts by a rapidly increasing number of Christian readers of the Scriptures shows striking similarities to the split between academic theology and popular piety in high and late medieval Europe. Then, too, large sections of the Christian population cultivated their own popular versions of supernatural piety while theologians established more and more refined methods of theological thinking in and for the academy. However, then, unlike today, most of those Christians were illiterate and therefore did not have the means of making constructive and critical use of the biblical texts themselves for their spiritual challenge and journey. Today, although mostly literate, the vast majority of Christians are left with their uncritical views of biblical and other texts while we theologians concentrate on the foundations of critical thinking and further discuss the opportunities and limitations of human understanding and their implications for biblical criticism. What we have been neglecting more and more is the creative task of constructing theological programmes in which our best critical insights into the meaning of the Scriptures are put to use for the faith praxis of contemporary Christians and their church communities.

II. Biblical Criticism, Theology, and Christian Praxis

It seems that what we need urgently in theology today is a more integrated method of theological reflection in which our insights both into the biblical texts and the process of reading are mediated by our search for principles and strategies of political action. Of course, these interests of a political theology are not the only legitimate interests for a reading of the Scriptures, but they are essential for a Christian theology that approaches the Scriptures as one of its sources for the development of programmes for the transformation of this world. And the great global conversation advocated by hermeneutically minded theologians does present a suitable context for the genuinely pluralist discussion of such political programmes. In fact, such a material discussion of theological programmes for political action will further enhance the dignity of the Christian contribution to the global conversation insofar as now only epistemological and methodological issues but also political issues are debated.

Let us turn now more concretely to the relationship between biblical criticism and theology. How can the insights of recent biblical criticism inform theological thinking, and how can the reflection on theological methodology influence biblical criticism? I wish to approach this twofold question by examining briefly a number of related proposals.

In response to the later work of Martin Heidegger and to Rudolf Bultmann's use of the earlier Heidegger's hermeneutical considerations, a number of theologians such as Gerhard Ebeling and the late Ernst Fuchs have undertaken a hermeneutical reflection in theology. However, their interest in hermeneutics consisted in the hope that it would help contemporary theology to return critically to the Reformers' theology of the Word. According to Ebeling, interpretation is called for whenever the normal function of the Word is disturbed, but he hastens to qualify this claim: „The aim of such interpretation cannot, however, be anything other than the removal of the obstacle which prevents the word from mediating understanding by itself".[4] Thus, for him the task of hermeneutical theology is to make human beings more aware of the self-manifestation of the Word of God in the Scriptures. The goal is, as Ernst Fuchs put it, a hermeneutics of agreement (*„eine Hermeneutik des Einverständnisses"*).[5] Hence, hermeneutics functions here as the tool to renew the older Protestant tradition. Seen in the context of the German idealist notion of *Bildung,* what this kind of theological hermeneutics achieves is the education for a discovery of the Word in the Bible (and only there) and a reflection on the means of corresponding to this Word.

One of the problems with this kind of understanding of hermeneutics is that it threatens to automatize the process of understanding. It reduces it to an almost technocratic process of discovering that which has always been assumed to be there in the first place. Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics of tradition suffers from a similar reductionism. Both he and Ebeling know very well what they want to find: Gadamer wishes to rediscover the Greek tradition of truth-reflection and to reestablish its authority, and Ebeling wishes to approach the Bible in such a way that the Reformers' Word-of-God theology receives a renewed authority. Both want us to enter their respective tradition and to fuse with its authoritative horizon.

Over against such automatized versions of hermeneutical application, it would be of great benefit for contemporary theology to subscribe to a more open-ended search for the meaning of the biblical texts. Both the host of approaches to the Bible developed over the last two centuries and the great number of general theories of reading offer, of course, a very confusing picture, but they also promise a more original discovery of the meaning of biblical and other texts than the one promoted by either Gadamer or Ebeling.

What the literary study of the biblical texts, for instance, has achieved is the treatment of each individual book of the Bible as a *text,* i.e. as a interpreted composition and not just as a sum of quotes from which one might select verses. The

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[4] Gerhard Ebeling, „God and Word", in David Klemm, ed., *Hermeneutical Inquiry,* vol. I: *The Interpretation of Texts* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986), 219.

[5] Cf. Ernst Fuchs, *Hermeneutik,* 2nd ed. (Bad Cannstadt: Müllerschön, 1958), 136.

newly rediscovered text may be studied in terms of how it refers back to its particular and never interest-free history of formation, a method developed from the older approach to the Bible by historical-critical exegetes. The text can also be examined in terms of what imaginative possibilities of living it entails. Paul Ricoeur has advocated such a perspective. It is a welcome result of the literary reading of the Bible that it has freed us *from* an overemphasis on historiography and *for* an apprecation of whether the text and its particular history have actually something to say to us today. Thus, we may ask anew how we could make good and critical use of these existential impulses wich the text may have to offer to us today. In other words, what the literary reading of the biblical texts has made possible again is the enterprise of a biblical theology, not one which knows what is seeks, as in the case of Ebeling, but one which genuinely seeks for new and possibly better ways of understanding God and for new and possibly better ways of living in God's presence and shaping our lives accordingly.

In the preface to the second edition of his commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans, Karl Barth complained that the historical-critical exegetes were not critical enough, because they did not see what was actually at stake in the biblical texts.[6] While I agree with this statement I disagree with Barth's own subsequent method of developing a biblical theology. Although he named his dogmatics „Church Dogmatics" and thus pointed to the social context of his theological reflection, he never advanced to a theological reflection on the biblical text which was open to a mutually critical relationship with any other tradition or movement. Barth knew what he thought of the world, namely not much. Therefore, he was also unable to provide theological insights into the possibility of a theology of resistance when the Nazi machinery took charge of Germany. While he personally opposed the Nazis very strongly, his theology was unable to offer theological criteria for political action in general and resistance to the Nazis in particular because it had not examined the biblical texts and the texts of the church tradition or indeed the current methods of reading these texts either in terms of how they might have fostered fascist thinking themselves or in terms of how they offered critical and constructive possibilities for contributing towards a transformation of the world. In conclusion, then, Barth offered yet another variety of biblical criticism where the boundaries of biblical reading were fixed before the act of reading could begin.

David Tracy's theology, my final example, is committed to the open-ended process of reading the biblical texts and of conversing about adequate methods of reading. He has taken account of all the different approaches to hermeneutics in general and to biblical criticism in particular and attempted to overcome the dogmatisms lurking in all of these approaches to the text. He does not want to avoid the conflict of interpretations, and he encourages us to tackle the problems of the plurality and

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[6] Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), XII.

ambiguity in all texts and in all of our interpretative efforts. But his reflections remain at times within the confines of *understanding* with the occasional reference to liberating action or political programmes. He does admit that it „is true that the point is not to interpret the world but to change it. But we will change our understanding of what we mean when we so easily claim to interpret the world".[7] Although I agree with this statement, I think that we should press on and link in a dialectical fashion the interpretation of both our classical texts and our views of the universe with our reflection on principles and strategies of action.

III. Towards a New Biblical Theology

I hope to have shown in this article that the future course of Christian theology depends on the particular level of integration between biblical criticism and constructive theological projects. The options available to us so far seem to be the following: (1) We could continue to develop theories of biblical interpretation without linking them to the need for programmes of responsible action in the world and thus remain within the confines of the German idealist notion of *Bildung* by mere understanding. (2) We could ignore hermeneutics in the future in favour of following the call for praxis and just use the biblical texts as proof texts in a pragmatic way. (3) We could follow Barth and the representatives of the so-called New Hermeneutic such as Fuchs and Ebeling to a narrowly defined hermeneutics of agreement with the Word of God as mediated by a Reformation-style reading of the Scriptures. Or (4) we could agree with the pluralistic project of interpretation as advocated by David Tracy, but link it now dialectically to the development of principles and strategies of Christian action in this world.

Tracy has, of course, addressed the relationship between theory and praxis, but for him praxis means historical action itself, for instance „the event of a liberating praxis".[8] However, what we are looking for here is a mode of thinking which allows for a dialectical relationship between theories of biblical interpretation and theories of Christian action, that is, a speculative framework in which the different theoretical tasks of theology are united once again.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of modern hermeneutics, does offer such a paradigm for a genuinely dialectical theology. Having insisted in his *Speeches* that religion constitutes a dimension of human nature in its own right alongside metaphysics and morality, he nevertheless went on to stress their inseparable relationship. Religion,

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[7] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco, Horper and Row, 1907), 114.

[8] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 398.

speculation, and praxis form the triadic foundation on which human projects can be adequately shaped.[9] He thus contradicted both Kant's and Hegel's philosophical foundations of human action. Moreover by defining dialectic as the reflection on the art of conversation,[10] by establishing the social character of language,[11] and by limiting understanding to nothing more than approximation,[12] Schleiermacher, long before Lévinas and Ricoeur, had pointed to the other human being as the co-constitutive partner in all existential projects. Unfortunately, the way in which he overcame some of the legacy of German idealism had not been fully appreciated for a long time. Only recently have Schleiermacher's proposals received closer attention.[13] For him education for understanding is not a goal in itself. Rather hermeneutics only makes sense as the other side of rhetoric, and both as subdisciplines of dialectic.[14] Speaking and understanding are the two means of proper conversation about the projects of life. In his works on ethical questions he developed such concrete principles and strategies of political action, and both in his theological encyclopedia and in his *Glaubenslehre* he never lost sight of the ecclesial context of theology.[15] In fact he stresses that no doctrine of Christian faith makes sense outside the social context of the church, and that the definition of church is itself an ethical action.[16]

I am not arguing that we all ought to become Schleiermacherians in our theological pursuits, only that here we have one speculative approach to theology which links the theological exercise essentially to ethical concerns. Here „understanding" is appreciated as one, and only one, among the necessary tasks of Christian theology.

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[9] Friderich Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultured Despisers,* trans. Richard Crouter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 103: „Praxis is an art, speculation is a science, religion is sensibility and taste for the infinite."

[10] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Einleitung zur Dialektik* (1833): „Dialektik ist Darlegung der Grunds°tze für die kunstmäßige Gesprächführung in Gebiet des reinen Denkens." In F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Dialektik (1814/15) – Einleitung zur Dialektik* (1833), ed. Andreas Arndt, Philosophische Bibliothek 387 (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1988), 117.

[11] Fr. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutik,* ed. Heintz Kimmerle, 2nd ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1974), 34.

[12] Ibid. 62–64.

[13] See for example Gunter Scholz, *Die Philosophie Schleiermachers.* Erträge der Forschung 217 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1984); and Wolfgang H. Pleger, *Schleiermachers Philosophie* (Berlin and New York: de Gruyter, 1988).

[14] Scleiermacher, *Hermeneutik,* 76.

[15] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Kurze Darstellung des theologischen Studiums zum Behuf einleitender Vorlesungen,* ed. Heinrich Scholz, 4th ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1977), esp. §§3–7; and Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Der Christliche Glaube,* vol. I. ed. Martin Redeker, 7th ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1960), §2.

[16] Ibid., 12 (§2)

Schleiermacher attempted to develop a theology in this framework. What is important for us here is not so much his particular theory of text-interpretation, nor his own particular attempt at interpreting the biblical texts, but his insistence that all of these critical tasks constitute only parts of the larger theological exercise.

Although I agree in principle with Schleiermacher's approach, I would like to argue that biblical criticism ought to be seen as one essential task of theology which may be distinguished but never separated from the overall ethical (or political) concern of Christian theology. If we can say that the biblical texts offer narratives of human experiences with God and human reflection on the relationship between God and the world, and if our aim is to interpret these texts with a view of developing modes of communal existence in this world, then we are on our way toward a „new biblical theology". I insist on the adjective „new" in order to highlight that this form of biblical theology wants not only to understand the theology of the biblical texts but also to develop a practical theology in the light of what these texts have to say in terms of how we could live our lives more responsibly.

BERNARD ZELECHOW

Literary Modernism and Biblical Hermeneutics: The Bible as Literature?

In an excursus to his *Twelve Lectures on Modernity,*[1] a discourse devoted to the crisis of modernity and post-modernist thought, Habermas muses on Walter Benjamin's conception of history. Despite Benjamin's radical Marxism he grounds his notion of history, according to Habermas, in the Jewish mystical tradition. In fact, more correctly, Benjamin's view of history was biblically and Talmudically derived. Habermas sees in Benjamin's ideas a pathway out of the dilemma and predicament of post-modernist consciousness. However, Habermas curiously and paradoxically, abandons this line of inquiry just as he begins it. The rationale for this abrupt suspension of the discussion is that contemporary thinkers are uninterested in the insights to be found in biblical texts. Hence the paradox.

Modernity is grounded in an unacknowledged biblical framework but its success requires the conscious suppression of that grounding. From Montaigne's preface to his essays in which he announces that he is the subject of his work to Nietzsche's radical critique of European culture the history of European thought has been one of increasing paradox-expanding knowledge with knowing becoming more problematic, the secure sense of self dissolving into the more enigmatic and problematic notion of person and non-person. The biblical conception of knowing, speaking and negotiating the world transcends the paradox of paralytic hyper-consciousness of post-modern culture. It consists of a grounding paradoxical platform, a notion of infinite critique and the idea of knowing as redeeming acts all within a framework of historicity. Further long before Paul de Man defined literary language,[2] as non-blinded language, the biblical texts provided the principles of its own destruction and reconstruction. Yet, the intelligent secular common reader and thinker rarely turns to the biblical texts for illumination of existence. Presumably if this reader and thinker is interested in the biblical texts at all he or she is likely to turn to secondary sources such as biblical or literary criticism. While there is much to learn from both disciplines, in balance, both sources of insight are inadequate in relation to the import of the biblical writings. They do little to enhance the status of the texts in an indifferent if not hostile milieu. Biblical criticism and literary interpretation present their „readings" of biblical narratives as grounding

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[1] Habermas, J. Twelve Lectures on Modernity (Cambridge: Mass, MIT Press, 1987).

[2] de Man, P. Blindness and Insight.

the texts rather than the reverse. And in so doing both disciplines reenforce the devaluation and integrity of the biblical chronicles.

Modern literary criticism of the Hebrew Scriptures has incorporated in its re-evaluation of biblical narratives many of the least adequate and most anachronistic aspects of biblical criticism. Hence, although this paper is concerned with the relationship between literature and biblical texts, a few words about biblical criticism and hermeneutics are in order. Characteristic of the history of biblical hermeneutics in the modern period is the systematic devaluation of the religious or existential significance and communicated meaning of the biblical texts. This deflation results from (1) the conceptual confusion between the structure of historicity and history with the underlying presupposition that language is exclusively propositional (2) a century of biblical criticism grounded in an evolutionary hypothesis in search of „ur" texts resulting in textual fragmentation and infinite regress (3) the conflation of theological doctrine and dogma (closure) with biblical values that are open and infinite, (4) and authoritarian fundamentalist appropriation of the texts.

Critics consistently attacked biblical texts, particularly Hebrew Scriptures, for their inadequacy according to 19th century positivist „scientific norms". Building on the old misconception that the biblical texts were a single book, classical biblical criticism presupposed that the Bible *should* contain a unitary, linear, continuous account of revelation. Investigation by critics revealed an apparent lack of unity, a discovery of a multiplicity of authors writing in different times and places, and the alleged logical incoherence of the redactor/redactors. Therefore, in the first instance biblical criticism attacked the veracity of the biblical texts on the grounds that the writings were historically untrue, inaccurate and contradictory.

The intellectual milieu of nineteenth century culture contributed to the blindness of biblical critics to the paradoxical nature of biblical form and content; that is, the absence of linearity despite the apparent form of linearity, the presence of propositional tropes with the absence of propositional content, and the notion of God's creative omniscience against God's endowment of freedom in the created persons.[3]

The presupposition that biblical texts were human cultural products shaped the agenda of philology and biblical criticism. They sought to bring the „accurate" historicity of the texts into bold relief. Their underlying explicit programme was to give the biblical texts an accurate temporal (understood as chronology) and therefore historical reality.

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[3] The absence of linearity provided classical biblical criticism with a double source for the condemnation and devaluation of Hebrew Scriptures as well as a means for a negative comparison between biblical narrative and „modern knowledge". They presupposed an evolutionary teleological unity and progressive refinement of ideas culminating in the „Gospels" simultaneously with the accusation that the Hebrew texts were the product of primitive minds and a primitive culture.

Under the banner of historicism, and inadequate conception of historicity, biblical criticism gave the biblical texts a burdensome past. The positivist conception of supposed biblical unity conflated several radically different if related concepts, historicity and facticity, chronology and meaning narrativity and linearity, and propositional truth and interpretation. Further the positivist assumptions of biblical criticism confused the relationship of propositional and descriptive language and the metaphoric and interpretive nature of truth. These critics concerned with the alleged facticity of biblical texts treated the biblical language as if it were authentic propositional language rather than speech that sometimes utilized a propositional rhetorical trope. The result was the judgement that the texts contained gross factual errors. Instead of a meaningful sequence of narrative infused with significance criticism, obsessed with the problem of origins and linearity, fractured the texts by a method of infinite regress.

The systematic critique of the historical validity of biblical texts by biblical critics and a vocal segment of the proponents of modernism generated the judgement that the texts were irrelevant narratives in relation to modernity. In recent decades as formalism recedes in art, literary critics have renewed an interest in the literary value of biblical texts. Modernist literary experiments have made critics sensitive to aspects of biblical writing ignored by traditional biblical critics. What biblical criticism found most inadequate in biblical texts modernist literary critics find to be their greatest strength.

Contemporary literary critics have taken it upon themselves to save biblical texts from incipient oblivion among English speaking „common readers". Literary criticism has worked strenously toward a validation and rehabilitation of biblical texts into the canon of Western art. But the problem for the literary modernist canon is that its emphasis treats from as content. This tendency escacerbated the negative aspects of biblical criticism. The literary approach to biblical narrative incorporates from biblical criticism the notions that the biblical texts do not bear the structure of historicity, that God is not a major player in the stories and the paradox of freedom is not central to the meaning of the texts.

Another set of problems beset Jewish and secular critics of the Hebrew Bible. They presuppose the primarily hostile framework presented by Christian biblical critics and Anglo-American literary analysis. Until fairly recently Anglo-American literary criticism assumed a symbiotic relationship between literary and Christian traditions. The conflation of Christian doctrine and dogma with biblical texts masked vital presuppositions and values underlying biblical narrative. Dogma and doctrine signify normative closure while the paradox of freedom, intrinsic to the biblical texts, denotes liberation and openness. Therefore the leading Jewish literary critics, writing in opposition to the traditional Christian framework, who wish to save the appearances of the narratives,

overemphasize the absence of normative qualities, the dearth of theological unities and the „secularity" of the text.

The Jewish literary critic asks, can the Bible be read in light of modernist literature? Can the texts be redeemed in a modernist perspective? The literary hypothesis unstated presupposition is that the exclusive worthiness of literature is intrinsic and autonomous in relation to biblical narrative. For these writers the merit of literature and art (left unexamined) replace the values imbedded in the biblical texts. Tacitly, these writers asert that we turn to literature for insights into the meaning of life in the way our ancestors read the biblical narratives. Suggested in this set of assumptions in the idea that literature has, within modernity, replaced the Bible as a source of revelation about existence.

The central tenet of literary criticism is that biblical writings are analogues of modernist literary products. The redemption of the biblical texts is presented in terms of the canons of the modernist and post-modern novel. The techniques employed by Pound, Proust, and Joyce, becomes the new criterion for understanding biblical narrative techniques. The hallmark of modernist literature is the employment of the technique of temporal discontinuities, spatial displacement, intrusion of „foreign" narrative voices, and ambiguity of perspectives and the paradoxical non-linear unities of the biblical writings. Hence literary modernism amplifies the multiple dialectical narrative structure of biblical writings and brings into sharp focus the existential dimensions of the texts. These critics are also sensitive to the non-linear unities of biblical writings.

Robert Alter started a movement of subsuming biblical texts under literary canons with his perceptive close reading of biblical narrative in *The Art of Biblical Narrative.* The premise of Alter's redemtion and rehabilitation of biblical texts from the damage caused by biblical criticism and fundamentalism is the proposition that we have lost the ability to read, to hear what the texts are saying. According to Alter the ambiguities and complexities of modern literature teach us how to read the biblical narratives. It illuminates what reading meant for our ancestors.

Alter's prior investigation of the history of narrative literature prepared the ground for his work on biblical texts. In his early work Alter argues that the nineteenth century „realistic" novel with its aggressive absolute linear form and its omniscient narrator is not paradigmatic of narrative literature. The novels of Fielding and Cervantes, for example, display techniques common in twentieth century literature. These are the canons that Alter uses to justify the literary „eccentricities" of biblical narrative-doubling, sequential discontinuities, contradictory repetitions that so disturbed the early biblical critics. Further Alter's stress on the biblical penchant for tropes that resonate through various narratives in radically different contexts undercuts the notion of propositional content in biblical speech. Instead he brings into bold relief in positive terms the biblical use of ellipse, ambiguity and methaphor.

Most critics adopt Alter's approach to the redemption of the biblical texts. The problem with Alter's position is its radical nominalism. That is, that is lacks either a theory of reading praxis or theoretical structure for the nature of literature and the biblical texts. Further, it falls victim to the critique presented by Meyer Sternberg. Sterberg argues that for all the analogies to biblical tradition in the literary methodology, the Hebrew Bible cannot be reduced to merely a work of literature. For him the Hebrew Bible is about epistemology, history, and theology as well as storytelling.

Most recently Gabriel Josipovici, although committed to the literary hypothesis, comes closest among the literary theorists to meeting Sternberg's criticism. Josipovici explores through literary devices the biblical weltanschauung as well as its literary structures. He recognizes implicitly the importance of crucial elements in the Hebrew Bible that transcend the canons of literature and in fact make literature possible.

With an eye on the English tradition linking theology and literature Josipovici begins with an provocative and fruitful polemic concerning the difference between the Hebrew Bible and Christian Scriptures. Central to his argument is that the disparate organization of the two canons and the implications that flow from the canonizations provide a strikingly dissimilar view of existence and the meaning of life. Josipovici demonstrates persuasively that the organization of the Hebrew canon leads to an open ended existential view of reality and that the Christian canon aims for a fourfold unity leading to the expectations of final closure.

Josipovici provides very close readings of the opening chapters of Genesis. He uses the creation texts as a model for the way in which the biblical authors elude all attempts to allow closure to occur. He demonstrates how the text is not only ambiguous but defies resolution and closure in its stubborn adherence to what he believes to be an authentic view of reality.

Conversely Josipovici seeks to demonstrate how closure is at the heart of the Christian canon. By definition closure leads to the finality of dogma and doctrine in the expectation of insuring certitude and security. A corollary of closure is the impulse to certainty and a drive for an authoritarian appropriation of the text. The most provocative aspect of Josipovici's work is his explication and illumination of how the demands for closure, in accordance with the dogmatic dimensions of early Christianity, forces the Christian gospel writers to lapse from the stance of authentic narrative into forced and artificial conclusions.

Josipovici elucidates the multiplicity of sophisticated narrative techniques employed by the biblical writers. Josipovici is particularly adept at relating various narrative techniques to differing worldviews. Unfortunately, he ignores the reality of the attempts at closure in the Hebrew Bible and the moments of real storytelling in the Christian canon to say nothing of the large shared body of narrative. The Hebrew Bible is replete with expressions of the struggle between the libertarian and authoritarian

renditions of the texts. In the Christian context Josipovici ignores the fact that the Gospel writers are individuals telling stories. Even St. Paul claims only to be writing letters to communities.

Josipovici because of his commitment to the privileged position of literature fails to draw out the implications of his powerful insights. The most serious problem in Josipovici's approach is his prior commitment to demonstrate that biblical texts conform to the conception of existence in modernist literature. This is his justification for judging the Hebrew Scriptures to be more compatible than the Gospels with the ethos of the modern world. He can do this only by bracketing out the genuine commitment of all of the biblical authors to a faithfulness to the living God. In simple terms this is an enormous lacunae in his interpretation. Descriptively, for Josipovici modernity leads us back to biblical texts. However, he does not recognize that prescriptively it is the biblical texts that make modernity possible.

The distinction between description and prescription is important because modernist and post-modernist culture flounders over the issue of self-legitimatizing values. It is in this sphere that modernist aesthetic assumptions are inadequate in dealing with biblical texts and the insights that biblical values provide a rationale for aesthetic communication. Modernist omissions also lead to a false polarization between biblical existence and modern secularism.

By suggestion if not by explicit assertion literary modernism claims to make the biblical texts secular. By inference its goals are to liberate the texts from the religious context. The most recent example of the radical distortion of the biblical texts in the name of secularism is presented by Harold Bloom. Bloom in an ironic regression to the documentary hypothesis seeks to disassociate the J text from the rest of the biblical narratives. His motive for this strategy relates to his conception of normative Judaism and dogmatic Christianity. Bloom recognizes that the doctrines of the two faiths an the biblical texts are not equivalents. The justification according to Bloom is that the J strand is in contradistinction to the other biblical narratives by being „secular" literature rather than religious dogma. In the context of his most recent book Bloom understands the term „secular" to mean that the J texts are subsumed under the category of art and are meant to be read as art.

Bloom's definition of „secularism" represents a commonplace misconception of its meaning. The definition presupposes the antithesis between the secular and the religious whereas the opposite of the religious and the secular is the profane. Secularism is a religious orientation that in fact is drawn from the biblical perspective. Spinoza was the first explicit secularist. He was the preeminent thinker in the European context to explicate boldly the secular-religious programme of the biblical texts. He explicitly draws

from the biblical texts the religious basis of constitutional monarchy and constitutional democracy.[4]

The question that arises immediately from Bloom's assertions is: how does one read the biblical texts differently from Shakespeare? Is Shakespeare, an acknowledged literary genius (Bloom's term) not a religious writer? Can there be an art that is not religious? Existentially what are the features that distinguish the one from the other? How do the religious and secular differ?

These are not issues that interest Bloom. His preoccupation is in debunking the crudest notions of what the religious can mean. The religious in Bloom's work is reduced to false piety, mystification and authoritarian appropriation of meaning. The religious is equated with the sentiments associated with harmless sentimental greeting cards and in sinister fashion with totalitarianism.

Bloom throughout this book expresses some interesting appropriate insights albeit about the biblical texts and their relation to culture. However, invariably he draws inadequate conclusions from his reading. Bloom understands that much of the doctrine and dogmas of organized religion are not borne out by a close reading of the biblical texts. Bloom sees the conspiratorial imposition of doctrine and dogma on the biblical texts by Christianity and what he calls „normative" Judaism to the detriment to the literary value of the J strands within the composite texts.

This complaint translates into the proposition that the God of J and the God of the Bible and hence the God of Christianity and Judaism are not the same. Bloom's insight is partially correct but the deduction is wholly false. The biblical texts do reflect the struggle between the institutional appropiation of the texts and the liberating biblical message. The struggle is brought into bold relief by the brillance of the redactor. Further the expression of the struggle enriches the religious and literary qualities of the texts.

According to Bloom J lives in a moral and political vacuum that he identifies positively, not with irony, but as the Solomanic enlightenment. Not only is J a member of the Solomanic court but J is a *woman*. Bloom's reading of the book of J is more traditional than he would acknowledge. He is not the first to point out the outrageous humour of the texts, the impulse to punning wherever possible, and the anthropomorphic conception of an awesome if somewhat bumbling and pompous God. But what is

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[4] Secularism is a platform that exalts the dignity of persons and places its faith in the ability of individuals to live with propriety and grace without the intervention of the violence of the coercive power of the state. The secular worldview is fundamentally egalitarian in that its faith in the individual person grounds its vision of community. For community to be possible each person must b endowed with equality and the ability to exercise the freedom necessary to fulfil the human task. No person in a secular society is privileged over and above others. The process of government is the guardian of those rights necessary for the individual to realize the task of becoming a person within the community.

different in Bloom's account is his denial that J's characterization of God and human existence bear any metaphysical or theological import. According to Bloom J is not onterested in these issues. But in fact J's relationship with God is central to J and to Bloom's exegesis of the text. It is J's extravagant picture of God that so enchants us. Nonetheless Bloom insists that J, in his words, the supreme literary artist, is concerned only with the ironic, defined as the exploration of incommensurate.

Bloom's conception of metaphysics is as crude as his definition of the religious. He understands metaphysics to reside in irrelevant abstract transcendent principles rather than in the real existential grounds of the problems of living. However, it is precisely J's understanding of creation, God's relationship to humanity, and the biblical conception of paradoxical freedom that is authentically metaphysical. Although Bloom is quick to point out that J's conception of humanity is monistic rather than dualistic and that this insight into humanity in the creation story is of profound originality he recognizes nothing of theological value in these existential concepts. Finally his defense of J as an ironic observer of life's incongruity blinds him to the fact that J's account of the creation story is more than a mere gem of a story. It is a narrative that expresses metaphorically the human coming into consciousness and recognition of the paradoxical nature of freedom. By abstracting J out of the composite text Bloom's insights lose the complex awareness of the redactor. Bloom points out rightly the ways in which God fails to understand the paradox of freedom but without giving equal weight to the human failure that is also expressed in the text. At no point does he recognize the redactor's radical notion that the partnership between God and persons is a mutual learning experience.

Bloom's work discredits the biblical texts and literature as well. He saps literature of all moral and prophetic content reducing it to disinterested and false ironic commentary. His irony fails to encompass the notion of deception and self-deception that makes great literature noble and makes the biblical texts the grounds of all existential knowledge. Not all literary critics are as crude as Bloom in describing the religious. But they share a perspective that entails the repudiation of God as an actor in the narratives. The suppression of the role of God in the texts masks the relationship between divine platform and human story, and the paradox of freedom and biblical narrative form. Further it distorts the nature of biblical communication. It presupposes an anachronistic vision of biblical religiosity in terms of organized formal institutional religion.

The literary hypothesis presupposes that literary canon exclusively guards Western values and that is has saved the appearances of the biblical texts. However in light of post-modern criticism, particularly deconstruction, the vulnerability of literary privilege is brought into high relief. Post-modernism undermines the literary modernist position at central focal points, autonomy, the concept of canon, self-grounding legitimacy, the notion of presence and authorial intention.

The questions that arise from the critique are: Why is literature privileged? What is the purpose of literature and art? Are literature and art in general mere decoration? illusion? modes of false reconciliation (i.e. the contemplation of beauty? mere entertainment?) Or does art profess some higher educative function? If the answer is yes to the final question then a new set of questions arise. What justifies this elevated status of art? What grounds the function of art?[5]

Answers to these questions are crucial because the literary hypothesis presupposes that literature, if it is not mere decoration, is redemptive and prophetic. That function requires critique, the structure of historicity and the illumination of the complex paradox of freedom to ground its argument. Without these central motifs personal and social transformation is impossible. However, the literary approach is inadequate in (1) warranting itself (2) grounding its critique of culture and (3) withstanding the post-modernist revision of hermeneutics. Only the biblical vision transcends these limitations and provides the ground to refute the post-modernist critique. The biblical texts provide an appropriate relational epistemology encompassing critique, platform and historicity, and offer and alternative version of presence and absence, self and personhood to the traditional academic dualist notions and most importantly rendering the principles of its own self-critique.

The suppression of God by the literary critics deprives them of their strongest weapon in responding to deconstruction. It is common knowledge that postmodernism attacks the idea of God and history. The repudiation of God and all that presumably follows from the idea of God rests on the Platonic definition of God as absolute Presence and self-identity. A denial of Presence, for structuralism and deconstruction, also implies the recession of an author, and undecidable communication.

However, the deconstructionist God and conception of history are not the same as the biblical God and the biblical conception of historicity. The biblical God defies the deconstructionist insistence that if absolute Presence is not absolutely present then Presence is negated into absolute absence. Th biblical God is enigmatically infinitely near and infinitely remote, a presence that is neither wholly transparent or undividedly

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[5] The rise of biblical criticism was paralleled by the ascendancy of art as a religious mode of exploring the meaning of existence. With the French and Industrial revolutions organized religion ceased to play a significant role in the shaping of European consciousness. Art played a significant role in moulding modern sensibility. Art both in prophetic an therefore biblical form and ritualistic and idolatrous modes performed the role previously assigned to religion. Consequently, religion was aestheticized and art was infused with religious sentiment. The result was the blurring of the distinction between the sacred and the profane and the false polarization of the religious and the secular. However, by the end of the nineteenth century art withdrew from the centre of public discourse into an elitist avant-garde context that turned inward. The justification for this withdrawal was the assertion that the business of art was art. Art was self-referential and autonomous.

opaque. Deconstruction further links God to the notion of the self. With the absence of God the self collapses. But, the biblical writers tell us that we are made in God's image. Hence the attributes of human beings share alteit in unequal measure characteristics with God. The human being is not a solipsistic self but a person, with all the attributes implied etymologically, created in a community grounded in communion and communication. The way the biblical writers construe communion, community and communication already contains the fundamental insights of deconstruction about interpretation in its fundamental framework.

A central aspect of the biblical God is that God is a speaker. And the biblical texts do proclaim that biblical language is God's word and is absolute. But, the very absoluteness of the communication collides with the notion of literal reading. Biblical speech, the archetype of all communication is the antithesis of false closure implied by literalism. Biblical speech is based on a paradox. The biblical authors attribute to God authorship an authority. That is the biblical authors proclaim that revelation is the absolute word of God yet the word comes to humanity in the form of human speech. As such the sanctity of the biblical word requires interpretation of all its ambiguities in order that the communication becomes intelligible. The mode of biblical communication enjoins the reader to re-author the text.

The ambiguity of biblical speech generates a unique hermeneutic. The biblical authors thought in terms of multiple, sometimes parallel sacred texts and writings. The biblical authors, while presupposing the absolute eternal meaning of God's story, entertained multiple interpretations of that story with equanimity. Multiple voices in a single text and alternative versions of events are placed side by side without engendering anxiety about the nature of truth. The issue for the biblical writers was the meaning of events rather than the detailed veracity of those events. The guarantee of the sacrosanct nature of biblical speech is the intimate link between radical critique of all values and the expectation of redemption within a framework of historicity.

The epistemological critique of the traditional approach to knowing that dominates the history of ideas in the twentieth century illuminates the relationship between modernity and its biblical roots. More likely in implicit form the modern worldview recognizes that knowledge is relational with justification replacing the concept of explanation and proof. The source of a relational view of knowing as a doing in the world is found in biblical speech that transcends language, the covenant that is the grounds of all relationship, and the paradox of freedom that makes critique meaningful and worldbuilding possible.

Biblical insight is particularly necessary considering the insights of modern consciousness. Modernity flounders on its own self-understanding. Its professes that its greatest achivements are grounded in human autonomy. But paradoxically its insights demonstrate that in fact human activity cannot ground itself. The culmination of modernity in paradox follows from the commitment to critique. Yet, in the noticable absence of the biblical platform critique is forever in danger of falling into despair. For what outside of biblical values can ground critique?

METHODS

EDGAR V. MCKNIGHT

Reader-Response Criticism and Hermeneutics

The thesis of this paper is (1) that the reader-response approaches developed against the background of American Formalism (New Criticism) may be modified by a more self-conscious interaction with East European Formalism (Structuralism) and (2) that such a reader-response approach will rehabilitate the New Testament hermeneutics in the tradition of Rudolf Bultmann. The first part of the paper will deal with American reader-response criticism as exemplified by Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser and show how the epistemological quandry in such criticism is resolved by East European structural views. The second part will discuss the post-Bultmannian appropriation of secular literary criticism by biblical studies.

I. Reader-Response Criticism against the Background of American New Criticism and East European Structuralism

Reader-response criticism is not a conceptually unified criticism; it is a spectrum of positions. Specific variants are defined in part by the prior literary and philosophical assumptions of those who practice reader-response criticism. My own project is the utilization of literary criticism in general and reader-oriented approaches in particular to carry out the goal of New Testament hermeneutics by enabling the discovery and creation of meaning-for-the-reader.[1]

Common to all American reader-response approaches is the background of American Formalism (New Criticism) with its insistence on the structural unity of a literary work and the process of close reading which uncovers that structure. The elements which were highlighted in New Criticism's close reading also remain important for reader-response criticism. In fiction, for example, Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren specify that questions such as the following be asked:

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[1] Critical theories which do not approach the theme from the perspective of the activity of contemporary readers or offer strategies of reading will not be treated in this essay. Wayne C. Booth and others speak of „implied" authors and readers as rhetorical devices of the actual author. These are to be built up by the reader on the basis of such things as the explicit commentary of the narrator, the kind of tale being told by the author, the meanings which can be extracted, and the moral and emotional content of the actions of the characters. The goal of a real reader is to become the implied reader and to find the implied author. The reader-reception criticism associated with Hans Robert Jauss is concerned with the history of readers' reception. This approach attempts to situate a literary work within the cultural context and the changing contexts of historical readers. Psychological approaches to the reader emphasize the stages of development of individual readers or (as in the case of Norman N. Holland) the role played by the „psychological set" of readers.

> 1. What are the characters like? 2. Are they „real"? 3. What do they want? (motivation) 4. Why do they do what they do? (motivation) 5. Do their actions logically follow from their natures? (consistency of character) 6. What do their actions tell about their characters? 7. How are the individual pieces of action – the special incidents – related to each other? (plot development) 8. How are the characters related to each other? (subordination and emphasis among characters; conflict among characters) 10. How are the characters and incidents related to the theme?[2]

Reader-response criticism approaches literature and its elements in terms of the values, attitudes, and responses of readers. The meaning of a text is not like the content of a nut, it does not simply await its extraction by a reader. The reader plays a role in the „production" or „creation" of meaning and significance.

Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser.

A summary of the approaches represented by Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser will provide a basic vocabulary and perspective for understanding the major variants of reader-response criticism. The disagreement between these two will provide space for a reader-oriented literary approach capable of accomodating a renewed New Testament hermeneutics.

Stanley Fish. The background for the work of Stanley Fish was New Criticism's view of the independence and self sufficiency of the literary work of art and its attention to close reading of the literary work itself instead of to history, biography, and so on. Fish initiated his reader-response approach when he concluded that the essential factor in meaning is not the spacial form of the text on the page but the temporal process of reading. In his early work Fish did not question assumptions of New Critics about the integrity of language and the text. Moreover, close reading and the elements of literature attended to in close reading remained important. Conventional concerns of criticism (the question of intellectual background, as well as questions of literary conventions and genre) were redefined in terms of potential and probable response of readers.

From a later perspective, Fish acknowledges that his early work was not radical enough, that he had been retaining the most basic of New Critical principles – the

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[2] *Understanding Fiction* (New York: F. S. Crofts & Company, 1943), p. 28.

integrity of the text – in order to claim universality and objectivity for his method. The radical move away from New Critical assumptions came when Fish discerned that literature is a conventional category dependent upon subjective perception. There is no basic or neutral literary language uncolored by perception and response. The conclusion is that „it is the reader who 'makes' literature". Fish qualifies this subjectivism by defining readers as members of interpretative communities (communities which differ over such matters as the nature and function of literature, for example) which determine the attention given by readers and the kind of literature made by readers.[3]

Wolfgang Iser. The work of Wolfgang Iser may be seen as mediating the position that meaning is pure-and-simply a content of texts (like the content of a nut) and the position that meaning is essentially a product of the reader. Iser sees the text as the product of an author's intention, with the reading of the text involving not only the intention of the author but also the intention of the reader. The necessary creative activity of the reader does not indicate (as with Fish) that literature and meaning are essentially dependent upon subjective perception. In fact, Iser's work continues the phenomenological tradition in philosophy which denies that the relationship between things in the world (texts) and observers (readers) is such that things in themselves are unknowable.[4] In proper reading, the essential structures of the text (and therefore its integrity) are maintained.

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[3] *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 67.

[4] The phenomenological tradition in which the work of Wolfgang Iser is situated arose as an attempt to re-establish the reality of the world by answering the philosophical theory that things-in-themselves are unknowable, that things are always perceived in terms of the one perceiving. The term „phenomenology" indicates that what is attempted in theory and practice is the investigation and description of the essential structures of the phenomena that appear in immediate experience. Two assumptions are vital: that the phenomena are constituted by consciousness through intentionality and that, although the phenomena assume accidental or nonessential forms, investigation may reveal forms that are to be regarded as essential in the sense that they cannot be removed without destroying the basic intentionality of the data. In two volumes (*The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art,* trans. Ruth Ann Crowley and Kenneth R. Olson [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973] and *The Literary Work of Art: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Ontology, Logic, and Theory of Literature,* trans. George G. Grabowicz [Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973]) the phenomenologist philosopher Roman Ingarden studied the formal structures common to all works of literature and the nature of cognition which is a valid and true reconstruction of the literary work. Ingarden distinguishes between the work of art itself and a concretization of the work which is constituted during reading. The complexity of a literary work is such that the reader has too much to do at the same time and cannot give himself/herself equally to all of the components of the total apprehension. Only a few of the multiplicity of simultaneously experienced and interwoven acts become central.

Iser emphasizes that not only the actual text but also the actions involved in responding to that text must be considered in literature. A literary text is not complete in itself. „Gaps" exist – a lack of complete continuity and/or a lack of specification of relationships between the different linguistic and literary elements. Iser makes the „gaps" and completion of „gaps" by the reader the central factor in literary communication. In the linear process of reading there is movement from one literary unit to another and the bridging or unifying of the units by the reader. This process of unification requires the formation of an idea or theme (a field of reference) within which the two segments make sense. In reading, there is movement from one theme to another theme, with the earlier theme becoming the point of departure for the new theme. The same activity of unification must be carried out at the level of the entire literary work. That is, an idea must be formulated which will allow all of the linguistic and literary elements of the work to coexist so that the work will „make sense". Iser speaks of the development of an overarching idea as the „basic force" in literary communication. He calls it „negativity". It may be thought of in different ways: as the „frame" within which the relevant textual material is organized and subsumed; as the cause underlying the questioning of the world in the text; or as the unwritten base that conditions the formulations of the text by means of the „gaps" (from this perspective the term „negativity" makes sense). The idea does not come from the text alone, but it must be consistent with the text. The reader must ask, „What is the text all about?" Formulation of the idea requires the reader's observation of the world of the text (what is going on in the text). But just as important is the requirement of observation of the world of the text from outside; the reader must transcend the textual world to make sense of the textual world.

The reader becomes most fully involved as the reader is forced to become aware of norms and systems which have become a part of the literary text. These norms exist in the non-literary life of the reader, but the reader is unaware of them – as the reader is unaware of the atmosphere in which the reader lives. In literature the norms and systems must be brought to consciousness for the text to be actually experienced by the reader. Iser sees that „the process of fulfillment is always a selective one, and any one actualization can be judged against the background of the others potentially present in the textual structure of the reader's role."[5]

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[5] *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 37.

Language and the Structural Tradition.

The question of the integrity and determinacy of language, texts, and the subject is at the center of the different varieties of reader response criticism. Three positions have been noted in the paper so far: (1) the position of New Criticism and the early Fish which maintains the integrity of language and the determinacy of the textual meaning with the result that „informed readers" come to basically the same evaluation of literary texts; (2) the position of Iser which demands the creative activity of the reader but which maintains the integrity of the text with the result that in proper reading readers' intentions are determined by the text and are in continuity with the intention of the author; and (3) the position of the later Fish which emphasizes the indeterminacy of language and texts and makes the perception of the reader within a community the creator of literature.

The argument between Iser and the later Fish on determinacy of language and literature is important for reader-response approaches to biblical texts. A strong view of integrity and determinacy of texts and meaning would maintain the internal and external relationships and references in such a way that the text could be treated essentially as a scientific document or an historical artifact and analyzed according to scientific or historical-critical criteria. An integrity and determinacy more suited to literature and appropriate for New Testament hermeneutics would maintain intentionality in a general sense, for example, the broad classification of the text (e.g., comedy or tragedy) and the sorts of relationships which are involved in such a classification. But the text would not be forced at all points into some preconceived form. Readers would be allowed to sort out the potentiality of the text and the specific possibilities of the text in its uniqueness in their location. What a reader sees in one time and place would differ from what is seen in another time and place. When a biblical writing is classified as „gospel", for example, the idea of „gospel" will govern reading. But developments in world and church history, the history of interpretation of the Bible, and the psychological „set" and history of individual readers and groups of readers influence the idea of „gospel" and the way that a particular writing is seen as instancing that idea.

A loosely defined sort of integrity is what has actually prevailed in literature. The text has been the occasion for varieties of readings influenced by different contexts of reading (temporal, geographical, and ideological, for example). Past readers situated in specific times and places, with specific world views, have seen their particular readings as necessary and unrelated to context. Different readings have been judged wrong. Today, however, we are able to appreciate and utilize difference instead of being disabled by difference. (In his essay „Difference", Jacques Derrida enunciated the

differential nature of language and the continual deferring of meaning.[6] The work of Derrida has been used to support the loss of any stable meaning, linguistically and philosophically.) We are not required to choose between the establishment of the linguistic, or historical, or sociological meaning on the one hand and the forsaking of the possibility of meaning on the other hand.

East European Contributions. Attention to East European Structuralism instead of to French Structuralism would have prevented the cul de sac of a nihilistic poststructuralism. The literary tradition formulated against the background of East European formalism provides theoretical and practical resources for development and use of a view of textual unity or structure which is energetic and dynamic and capable of responding to cultural and individual development and valuation.[7] One basic argument and development in East European Formalism had to do with the autonomy of the literary work of art – just as in New Criticism. A severe formalist approach took the position that only structures immanent in the text are the object of literary concern. The comparison of poetics with the art of weaving by Viktor Sklovskij (a representative of the Leningrad branch of Russian Formalism) illustrates the extreme view of immanence: „I am concerned in the theory of literature only with the examination of its inner laws. To use an industrial metaphor, when studying the art of weaving, I am not interested in the situation of the world cotton market, nor in the policy of the cotton trusts, but only in the count of yarn and the techniques of weaving".[8] The Prague formalist Jan Mukarovsky responded that the matter of weaving itself was certainly of more concern than conditions of the world market when studying the art of weaving, but he declared that the cotton market could not be entirely ignored. The needs of the market have some relation to development of the technique of weaving. The same is to be said for literature. Non-literary factors influence literature the way that the market influences the technique of weaving, not in a direct way or in a way to change the view of literature and the literary work as a nexus of relationships. Literary structure is dynamic and not static, capable of responding to its different contexts and maintaining the nexus of internal relationships. This view of structure is adopted by Iser, for the

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[6] „Difference", in *Margins of Philosophy,* trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 8.

[7] East European formalist movements ceased functioning as early as the late 1920s on account of pressure from doctrinaire Soviet Marxists and exemplary texts of the formalists were not available in translation until the sixties and seventies. As movements in the structural and semiotic study of narrative, poststructuralism, and deconstruction have become influential in America, however, arguments and developments in East European formalism (structuralism) have been recapitulated.

[8] Viktor Sklovskij, *O teorii prozy.* See Thomas G. Winner, „The Aesthetics and Poetics of the Prague Linguistic Circle", *Poetics* 8 (1973), p. 80.

„determinate" structure of meaning for Iser is not a static „summative whole" but it „finds itself in a ceaseless stage of movement".[9]

The view of the subject (or self) is important for a hermeneutical appropriation of reader-response criticism. The view of a unified autonomous self (analogous to a unified autonomous text) capable of complete self knowledge and knowledge of others is an Enlightenment perspective which has become problematic. The contemporary challenge to such a view of the self may either bring about efforts to validate such a view or create a nihilistic attitude toward meaning and truth (how can I understand another [or the expression of another] if that other does not completely understand himself or herself?). Just as a structural view of the literary text allows a text to retain integrity and determinacy while acknowledging change and difference, a structural view of the subject allows difference and maintains integrity. The subject is defined in part by experiences and inner and outer development. Literary experience is a part of this development and definition. It is because the subject is not a static and autonomous entity that the subject may be changed in the experience of reading.[10]

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[9] Iser cites Jan Mukarovsky's view of the energetic and dynamic character of the structure of the literary work: „The energy of the structure is derived from the fact that each of the elements in the overall unity has a specific function which incorporates it into the structural whole and binds it to that whole; the dynamism of the structural whole arises out of the fact that these individual functions and their interacting relationships are subject, by virtue of their energetic character, to continual transformations. The structure as a whole thus finds itself in a ceaseless state of movement, in contrast to a summative whole, which is destroyed by any change" (Jan Mukarovsky, *Kapital aus der Poetik* [Frankfort, 1967], p. 11). Cited in „The Repertoire" in *Critical Theory Since* 1965, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle (Talahassee: Florida State University Press, 1986), p. 380.

[10] See Edgar V. McKnight, *Meaning in texts: The Historical Shaping of a Narrative Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), pp. 24–25, 215–225.) for a discussion of the role of such a dynamic structure in the hermeneutical tradition of Wilhelm Dilthey.

Developments in structural semiotics, postrstructuralism, and deconstruction associated with scholars such as Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Jacques Derrida may be reconceptualized and utilized in a reader-oriented biblical hermeneutics. Barthes sees the structure of a text as dynamic and involving the reader in a process of analysis without a final synthesis or end. (Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. Richard Miller [London: Jonathan Cape, 1975]). Eco sees the process of reading as involving moves both within the text (intensional) and outside the text (extensional). The various levels and sublevels of textual and extra-textual realities are interconnected and the reader moves back and forth within and without the text to produce meaning. (Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979]). Derrida sets knowledge, language, meaning, and interpretation not simply within a dynamic cultural context but within a larger context of power and authority. Derrida's deconstructive approach to literature is concerned with the examination of the desire for mastery – the mastery of knowledge through language and meaning through interpretation – and the subversion of that desire through the very nature of language itself. The language and logic which form the resources of an author cannot be dominated absolutely by an author. The author uses them by being governed by them. A

The reader-oriented hermeneutical use I advocate acknowledges the dynamic and always in-process nature of the reading and the subject involved in the reading, but it emphasizes the making of sense for the reader – local, ad hoc, an partial as it may be. The unity and meaning found in a specific location and reading overlooks and/or excludes textual elements which cannot be assimilated in that reading, to be sure, but these elements become the basis for other unities and meanings.

II. Reader-Response Criticism and Biblical Study

Developments in Reader-Response Criticism of the Bible.

Radical reader-oriented approaches are foreign to the experience of historically-oriented biblical critics because of different views of the use of language and the nature of biblical literature. It is difficult to overcome this strangeness because conventional views of language and life reinforce one another. Both are governed by the Enlightenment model in which subject and object, humankind and the natural world, are distinct, with the subject – humankind – dominating. Language is a tool used by humans to refer and the truth of the reference is validated by the human subject through establishment of correspondence between the statement and that to which it refers.

Beginnings: Literary Study of the Bible. Reader-response criticism in biblical studies began with concern with genuine literary matters, a concern which surfaced in the 1960s and 70s and became commonplace in the 1980s. This turn in biblical studies reflected a return, in a certain sense, to concerns of the precritical period (prior to the Enlightenment). In that epoch, the cultural and intellectual distance between the biblical world and the reader's world was small. No distinction was made between the world depicted in the Bible and the real historical world. Readers had little difficulty seeing their own actions and feelings and the events of their world in relation to the biblical world. Resources of allegory and typology assisted readers to see the Bible as a whole as depicting the whole of historical reality. Old Testament stories referred directly to specific temporal events and indirectly (as figures or types) to New Testament stories, events, and realities. But these (both Old Testament and New Testament) also

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deconstructive reader seeks to discover relationships between what the author commands and what the author does not command of the patterns of the language used by the author. (Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology,* trans., Gayatri C. Spivak [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976], p. 158.) Reading in the conventional mode is a synthesizing process with the subject/reader being governed (as the subject/author) by language. But a deconstructive reading gives conscious attention to the impulse toward and result of the synthesizing of the conventional reading process in order to break its „domination".

corresponded to the historical experiences of the reader. The biblical world extended to and impinged upon the present, upon the world of the reader of any age. The power of a precritical reading extending from the Old Testament to the readers' day without any rupture depended in part upon the fact that the world of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the world of Moses and Jesus were not the ultimate reality. Above an beyond the world extending from Adam to the present was a divine world which alone made sense of this world. The Neoplatonic world-view of the ancient and medieval world did not methodologically exclude the sacred but rather made the sacred the standard.

With the Enlightenment, the historicity of literary and other cultural phenomena replaced the framework of the theological conceptualization of the ancient and medieval world. History became the standard. The realistic feature of biblical narrative was related consciously to historical reference. The role of the biblical stories was to enable readers to uncover the historical sequence or events to which they referred directly or indirectly. Undermined was the correlation between the world of the reader and the pre-existing divine world. This diminished the potential of the narratives to allow readers to make sense of themselves in relation to the world of the narrative in a somewhat direct fashion.

The literary turn was prepared for in the attempt of Rudolph Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic to extend the power of the biblical text into the life of contemporary readers by attention to its linguistic dimensions. Preoccupation with existential categories and the lack of interaction with secular literary criticism hindered the task. In his 1964 publication, *The Language of the Gospel,* Amos Wilder advocated a move which takes advantage of literary insights. He expounds the New Testament as „language event" (an expression used by the New Hermeneutic reflecting the idea that language and reality are inseparably connected, that reality comes into being through language) in terms of literary genre with the conviction that „behind the particular New Testament forms [genres] lies a particular life-experience and a language-shaping faith". Wilder explicitly criticizes Rudolf Bultmann's restriction of meaning to existential concepts. The view that the New Testament „tells us about ourselves, not about 'things' and the way they are and the way they happen", according to Wilder, results in a disparagement of „the whole story of man and salvation as the Bible presents it". The literary criticism appropriate for New Testament Study is not one which ignores reference and remains confined to the structures and conventions of literature. There is reference in the text, but the reference is not the same as that in conventional study of the Gospels. Students of the New Testament can learn about its literary language and reference from students of poetry: „this kind of report of reality – as in a world of art – is more subtle and

complex and concrete than in the case of a discursive statement, and therefore more adequate to the matter in hand and to things of importance".[11]

The Role and Function of the Bible in Reader-Response Literary Criticism. Assumptions about the role and function of the Bible are important in reader-response criticism. The role of the Bible as literature is to be distinguished from the role of the Bible as historical „source" or literary „document". To read the biblical text as source is to read it as the container of some sort of information that may be extracted by objective procedures and validated by comparing the data obtained with data in the real world. To begin with the Bible as historical source and subject it to historical-critical analysis in order to discover the history behind the biblical texts makes movement beyond historical-critical analysis difficult. Moreover, the matter of concern to believers cannot be obtained through such analysis as such. Robert Morgan has depicted the gap which has developed between philological and historical learning on the one hand and religious engagement and theological insight on the other hand.[12] The role of the Bible as document of ancient communication as such does not really bridge the gap. When the Bible is approached as both an ancient document with original meaning and a living message with contemporary significance, the bridge to a comprehensive and satisfying biblical hermeneutics may have been found. The reader's final focus is not upon the original circumstances, but upon the text in the contemporary context of reading.

Reference is in front of the text. We come to a biblical text and see it as a structural form generated from and within a moment of vital community and communication. The historian or social scientist will try to discover the precise way that the structures reflect or express the social or political or religious structures of a given society. The biblical text, however, may be approached as a means of recreating a meaning and significance of the text in a new day. The hermeneutic reader-response approach I advocate does not engage in the vain attempt to ascertain the historical

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[11] *The Language of the Gospel: Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York: Harper, 1964), p. 133. In 1975 Robert Tannehill displayed concern with contemporary literary criticism of biblical texts in *The Sword of His Mouth: Forceful and Imaginative Language in Synoptic Sayings* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1975), and with „The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role", (*Journal of Religion* 57 [1977]: 386–405) Tannehill integrated narrative and reader-response criticism. Mark's evaluation of the disciples is to be found in his depiction of the concordant/discordant relationships between Jesus and the disciples, but this is also the key to readers' evaluation. Moreover, as the plot develops readers are involved throught the arousal of expectations which are either fulfilled or left unfulfilled by what ensues. In 1985 and 1989, issues of *Semeia* (a journal devoted to new and emergent areas and approaches in biblical criticism) were dedicated to reader-response criticism. (Robert Detweiler, ed., „Reader Response Approaches to Biblical and Secular Texts", *Semeia* 31 [1985] and Edgar V. McKnight, ed., „Reader Perspectives on the New Testament", *Semeia* 48 [1989]).

[12] Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

and/or social foundation and to delineate the ways that the text is a product of such a foundational cause. The text is approached as a multifaceted nexus of structures which is capable of speaking again and again as new communities seek such a word. Literature is the genre which allows such a treatment.

As *literature,* the Bible plays a role in the life of society and individuals in that society. The role of the Bible (as the role of literature) may be seen as related to knowledge that the text makes possible for the reader – knowledge extended beyond the world of the text to the world uncovered by the text. The role of the Bible is to be seen in the light of cognitive and non-cognitive affective experiences of the reader in the process of making sense of the text as knowledge. It is to be seen in the light of the development of self knowledge *vis a vis* the world and the process of reading. The Bible as literature is seen as the instrument for humankind discovering, creating, and/or making sense of world, self, and whatever world-and-self-transcending meanings and values humankind is capable of imaging.

Secular reader-oriented theories not only emphasize the reader's role in the process of achieving meaning, they also see the result of reading in terms of an effect upon the reader. This is visualized in different ways. In his Oxford thesis, for example, Jonathan Culler suggested that the process of reading shows the reader the problems of the reader's condition as maker and reader of signs, and this is the meaning of the work.[13] Iser sees the process of reading as the coming together of text and imagination. It is an experience of continual modification closely akin to our experience in life. Because of the nature of the process the „reality" of the experience of reading illuminates the dynamic nature of real experiences.[14] Georges Poulet emphasizes the achievement of self-transcendence in reading. In reading, the object of the reader's thought is the thought of another. The reader becomes the subject of the thought (the one doing the thinking) in the act of reading. The reader thinks a thought that belongs to another mental world. „When I am absorbed in reading, a second self take over, a self which thinks and feels for me. ... The work lives its own life within me; in a certain sense, it thinks itself, and it even gives itself a meaning within me".[15]

The Bible as *religious literature* may be distinguished from other literature in terms of role and function. One way of beginning to mark the distinction of the Bible

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[13] „Literary Competence", *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism,* ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press), pp. 116–117.

[14] „The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach", *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism,* ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press), p. 56.

[15] „Criticism and the Experience of Interiority", *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism,* ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press), pp. 46–47.

is to note that the essential shape of biblical literature is comic. That is, the Bible depicts not a reversal of fortune from good to bad (tragedy) but a movement from bad to good. Although the Bible contains examples of romance, irony, and tragedy, the thrust of the Bible is in the direction of the comic. When these other genres are present, they are to be seen in terms of the more central comic movement. Tragedy in the Bible, for example, is seen as an essential episode in the larger scheme of the divine comedy which includes restoration and resurrection.[16]

The Bible is read in the context of continuing communities of faith, and even readers who do not share the faith of those communities are influenced by that fact. The life and faith (practice and theology) of the larger communities of faith and of the local expressions of those communities play their part in the experience of reading. Most of the time this is a silent, even unconscious, influence, the result of a faith perspective which is simply taken for granted. A dialectical relationship exists between the faith perspectives of religious communities and the world view of the encompassing philosophical and cultural world. A reader who is also a member of a religious community will operate with schemata from both worlds.

One reason we are able to transcend the project of Bultmann and the New Hermeneutic is that we are operating within a postmodern perspective. A value of Bultmann's work was his acceptance of the modern world and his attempt to formulate a hermeneutics which was consistent with the criteria of that world. Postmodernism is a result of directing the assumptions and the critical tools of the modern against the modern. „Modernism" is used in this context in a general way to refer to such things as the ascendancy of reason, the development of science and technology, the assumption and need for comprehensive critical theories, secularization, and the feeling that individuals and societies should be ushered toward such „modern" norms. „Postmodernism" is less confident of the values or „ideologies" of modernism. Postmodernism looks with favor on a modification of system dependent upon modernist ideologies. Postmodernism is wary of absolutes, totalizing constructions, and universalizations.

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[16] The literary critics Richard G. Moulton and Northrop Frye have given attention to the literary unity of the Bible. Both note the narrative unity. There is a beginning and an end, with movement involving not only narrative but a variety of other literary forms. Both Moulton and Frye emphasize the Apocalypse and the final conception of „the kingdom of the world" becoming „the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Revelation 11:15). The kerygmatic nature of the Bible as a whole is emphasized by both writers, with Frye actually using the term. See Moulton, *Modern Reader's Bible,* p. viii [See also *The Literary Study of the Bible: An Account of the Leading Forms of Literature Represented in the Sacred Writings* (Boston, New York, and Chicago: D. C. Heath & Co., 1899] and Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1982), pp. 29 – 30, 224 – 225.

A postmodern sensitivity will guard against equating the meaning and significance found by readers today with *the* meaning and significance. But postmodern readers will and do make sense, though it be (from some hypothetical point of ultimate truth) pragmatic, ad hoc, and local. The removal of the demand for universal quantification prior to finding local meaning and significance, in fact, increases the potential for meaning.

Cynicism and skepticism result from the attempt to carry out the modernist project with postmodern tools. In the skeptical mode, the critic remains above the local (worldly) context where meaning and signification occur in order to fault any and all interpretations as illegitimate. This „deconstructive" move reminds us not to succumb to the temptation to universalize the meaning one finds and/or the temporal cultural values involved in that meaning. Bultmann's existential grounding was satisfying – for its moment – as were Kant's moral imperative, Schleiermacher's feeling of absolute dependence, and Hegel's Absolute Spirit. A postmodern approach does not demand such a Universal perspective. One makes local, historically constrained, partial, temporary sense – or one makes no sense at all.[17]

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[17] Whether reader-response criticism of the Bible is viewed positively or negatively depends in part upon the world-view of the reader and the role and function of the Bible in that world-view. Readers who are committed to a „modern" Enlightenment paradigm will seek to eliminate or reduce the subjective character of study. If these readers utilize reader-response criticism, it will take the form of an objective search for the implied reader or for the strategies followed by the author in influencing the reader (rhetorical criticism) which can be demonstrated as existing in the ancient world. However, this essay advocates a reader-response approach which utilizes the rich possibilities of reading for actual readers. Such an approach is valuable for a variety of reasons. 1. Serious interaction with the text is facilitated by reader-response criticism. This reader-response approach may do for biblical study what the New Criticism did for literature in general – free the biblical text from its domination by disciplines such as history, sociology, and psychology. 2. This reader-response approach represent a victory for the reader. Readers are freed to make sense for themselves. This method allows readers to interact with the text in light of their own context, linguistic and literary competence, and need, as well as in light of the potentialities of the text. Confidence and further competence are developed as readers are able to make sense of the text in light of their own location and „dialect". 3. Such an approach allows the obvious religious concerns of the text to impinge upon reading in a way appropriate to the concerns of the reader. The world of the reader will be seen as „like" the biblical world in some way satisfying to the reader. A type of knowledge may result from the exprience of reading which is different from the knowledge gained by scientific methodologies. Levels of meaning and knowledge may be experienced which became lost with the Enlightment paradigm. 4. Reader-response approaches are capable of accomodating and utilizing approaches followed in more conventional biblical and literary studies. Historical and sociological exegesis, for example, are not precluded in reader-response criticism. They are reconceptualized and relativized, but not made illegitimate as such.

Specific criticism may be leveled at the use of reader-response criticism in biblical studies. An examination of these criticisms will show genuine limitations of the approach and ways that attitudes toward literature and toward the Bible may be modified for the development of a satisfying reader-response

criticism. 1. Reader-response approaches, even taken as a whole, are not comprehensive. They do not do everything that can be done and ought to be done in biblical studies. They do not substitute for conventional approaches. In secular literary criticism as such many reader-response critics remain associated with other „schools" (formalism, structuralism, phenomenology, deconstruction, Marxism, feminism, speech-act theory, for example). The same is true in biblical study. Just as in literary study, however, the reader-response shift from text as product to text as process will create changes in conventional studies. 2. Reader-response approaches to the Bible may be judged from the perspectives of both religious and historical study to be inappropriate because of the literary orientation of such approaches. The Bible is not literature in the conventional sense. A reduction of the Bible to secular literature would seem to be illegitimate. Reader-response criticism, however, does not demand the conclusion that biblical writings were composed within „literary" circles or designed to be read simply for enjoyment as „literary" works of art. The literary nature of the Bible is not due to writers' concern with *belles lettres* but to their utilization of the same linguistic and literary realities and principles as secular literature. It is also due to the fact that biblical writers are using language to appeal to readers who will find and create meanings that involve them, that match their needs and capacity at cognitive and non-cognitive levels. 3. The fact that reader-response approaches to the Bible grow out of literary study of fictional literature, primarily novels, makes such an approach suspect to some. This fact, however, may enable us to reconceive the „reference" in biblical literature as involving a truth which historical writing as such is unable to convey. A „world" is portrayed and revealed in biblical literature. It is not necessarily unrelated to what can be rediscovered historically of Israel, Jesus Christ, and the New Testament church; but it is more than that which historical criticism as such can contain. 4. Historical-critical readers will see in reader-response criticism a lack of regard for the intention of the author. This perception is valid. The conventional concern for the intention of the authors has (among other things) caused biblical criticism to remain moored at the historical level of questioning of authorship and intention. And the failure to arrive at „assured results" in this regard often frustrates attention to the text itself. Reader-response criticism does not ignore the author and the intention of the author; but the construction of author and author's intention is taken to be a strategy in reader response criticism. Intentionality from a literary perspective differs from intentionality from a historical perspective. E. D. Hirsch, Jr. speaks of intentionality in terms of the „consciously willed type" and it is this that defines verbal meaning (*Validity in Interpretation* [New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1967], pp. 53–54). In *The Aims of Interpretation,* Hirsch indicates a relationship between the reader and the „type". „... [T]hat which we are understanding is itself an hypothesis constructed by ourselves, a schema, or genre, or type which provokes expectation that are confirmed by our linguistic experience, or when they are not confirmed cause us to adjust our hypothesis or schema" (*The Aims of Interpretation* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976], pp. 33–34). 5. Reader-response criticism is very unsettling and overwhelming for „modern" readers who want to control the text and discover the meaning on the basis of a secure foundation. One critic has compared historical-critical work with reader-response approaches. Historical-critical work „often left an impression of banality – monophonic interpretation of polyphonic texts". But reader-response criticism „often gave the contrary impression of an excess of critical resources ... and of readings that outdid in complexity and creativity the texts being read". (Ben F. Meyer, „The Challenges of Text an Reader to the Historical-Critical Method", *The Bible and Its Readers,* eds. Wim Beuken, Sean Freyne, and Anton Weiler [Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991], p. 10). This characterization is valid. But we ought to expect such complexity and the developing capacity of readers.

DENNIS L. STAMPS

Rhetorical Criticism in New Testament Interpretation: an Appraisal and a Proposal

Introduction

'Rhetoric' has become a ubiquitous term. It is applied to a wide range of textual discourse, if all manner of textual discourse.[1] The exact implication or significance of this term as a meta-label is still an open debate. The debate as to whether it is a fitting or an inappropriate meta-label is not the particular scope of this paper.

The focus of this study is the use of rhetoric as a description of various interpretive strategies in New Testament studies. Since the publication of G. A. Kennedy's book, NewTestament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism, there has been a virtual tidal wave of exegetical renderings of New Testament texts using the rubric, 'rhetoric'.[2] The first part of the paper is a survey review of the recent development and practice of rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies. Next, the various stands of rhetorical criticism outlined in the survey are analyzed in terms of their methodological perspective on textuality and the interpretive goal. Finally, in response to the current practice(s) of rhetorical criticism, a proposal is made for a rhetorical critical theory and practice. As a result of this survey review and methodological analysis of rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies, it is hoped that the interpretive tensions and issues which are lurking behind the scenes and under the exegetical endeavors in New Testament studies are clearly exposed.

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[1] The theory for using the term, 'rhetoric', as a meta-label can be found in, Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1983), especially pp. 194 – 217, also Dick Leith and George Myerson, *The Power of Address: Explorations in Rhetoric* (London, Routledge, 1989) pp. 114 – 148, 204 – 240. The application of 'rhetoric' to a wide variety of discourses is exemplified in, John S. Nelson, Allan Megill, and Donald N. McCloskey eds., *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences* (Madison, Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), and Richard Roberts, ed., *The Recovery of Rhetoric: Persuasive Discourse and Interdisciplinarity in the Human Sciences* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1991).

[2] George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press, 1984). A record of the 'tidal wave' of publications since Kennedy is partially documented in, Duane F. Watson, 'The New Testament and Greco-Roman Rhetoric: A Bibliography', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31 (1988) 465 – 472.

different interpretive strategies.[3] The implication of this pluralism is that each critical method exists harmoniously with the other, with each complimenting the other to provide an ever growing nexus of ways and means to extract from the biblical text that allusive goal: its meaning.[4]

Such harmonious presentations masks the real landscape, a war. Behind this pluralism exists competing and uncomplimentary ways of understanding texts, meaning, and truth. By surveying and analysing only one critical perspective, rhetorical criticism, one can see what the fighting is all about.

I. Recent Developments in Rhetorical Criticism in New Testament Studies

James Muilenburg, an Old Testament scholar, is credited for introducing the phrase 'rhetorical criticism' into 20th century biblical studies with his writings in the mid 1950's.[5] His 1968 Society of Biblical Literature presidential address, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', sounded a clarion call to go beyond form criticism by using rhetorical criticism.[6] He only vaguely defined what he meant, suggesting that the text should be approached as an 'indissoluble whole, an artistic and creative unity, a unique formulation'.[7] By adopting this critical perspective, he hoped to find a means to move from the text to 'a raid on the ultimate'.[8]

In this phrase, 'a raid on the ultimate', one gains a glimpse at his understanding of text, meaning, and truth. As Walter Brueggemann, one of Muilenburg's students, stated in his 1990 Society of Biblical Literature presidential address, „I suggest that such a formulation bespeaks a kind of untroubled transcendentalism. Of course Muilenburg was not untroubled, and he knew the text was not untroubled. Nonetheless, he moves directly from the text to 'the ultimate'".[9]

A similar agenda was proposed for New Testament studies. Amos N. Wilder's classic work published in 1964, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel,*

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[3] A good example of this phenomenon is, Christopher Tuckett, *Reading the New Testament* (London, S. P. C. K., 1987).

[4] The relationship between meaning and the practice of biblical interpretation is chronicled in, Robert Morgan with John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford, O. U. P., 1988).

[5] James Muilenburg, 'A Study in Hebrew Rhetoric: Repetition and Style', *Vetus Testamentum Supplement* 1 (1953) 97–111, and 'The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66', in *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York, Abingdon, 1956) 5, 381–773.

[6] James Muilenburg, 'Form Criticism and Beyond', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969) 1–18.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 9.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[9] Walter Brueggemann, 'At the Mercy of Babylon: A Subversive Rereading of the Empire', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991) 18.

introduced a form of rhetorical criticism which emphasized, 'not so much ... what the early Christian said, as how they said it'.[10] However, he went further with respect to the text and its form in the preface to the 1971 reprint in which he suggested that scripture in its rhetoric was evidence of a particular and peculiar language event which, in Muilenburg's terms, 'raided the ultimate' by putting the reader in touch with the transcendent.[11]

Robert Funk took the insights of Wilder and give them a specific application to the parable and the epistle in his book, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God.*[12] In Funk's analysis, the parable is understood as a metaphor; the letter, as oral conversation. In both instances, for Funk, the forms create a language event in which a fresh experience of reality occurs. His understanding of text, meaning, and truth in this book is articulated in the that phase of biblical theology known as the 'New Hermeneutic'.[13] As a result of both Wilder and Funk, there emerged a number of critical treatments of the New Testament sensitive to literary critical theory and modern linguistics which discuss the rhetoric of the text.[14]

Rhetorical criticism in New Testament studies, however, is better known for that critical perspective intiated by H. D. Betz. His Hermeneia commentaries on Galatians and on 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 interpret the New Testament text in relation to or against the background of ancient Hellenistic classical rhetoric.[15] In this same vain is the famous classicist G. A. Kennedy, whose book, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism,* is now a watershed manual in New Testament rhetorical criticism. Both Betz and Kennedy attempt to show how the New Testament texts are examples of the art of ancient classical rhetoric and or function in a manner similar to ancient classical rhetorical theory. Kennedy proposes the following:

> What we need to do is to try to hear his [Paul's] words as a Greek-
> -speaking audience would have heard them, and that involves some

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[10] Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1971 reprint) p. 2.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] Robert W. Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God* (New York, Harper and Row, 1966).

[13] J. M. Robinson and J. B. Cobb, Jr., *The New Hermeneutic,* New Frontiers in Theology 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1964).

[14] See for example, William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1969), and R. A. Spencer, ed., *Orientation by Disorientation: Studies in Literary Criticism and Biblical Literary Criticism,* Pittsburgh Theological Monograph Series, no. 35 (Pittsburgh, The Pickwick Press, 1980).

[15] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia,* Hermeneia (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1979), and *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostole Paul,* Hermeneia (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985).

> understanding of classical rhetoric. ... the discovery of the author's intent and of how that is transmitted through a text to an audience.[16]

From this perspective, the New Testament supposedly was written and read in the context of Greco-Roman rhetoric and one can reconstruct that historical dimension in the text by identifying the classical-rhetorical units, classifying them, and thereby assigning their rhetorical function and intent in relation to the original situation, the original author, and the original audience.

Wilhelm Wuellner who was always on the perimeter of classical rhetorical criticism made a startling break-away in his now landmark article of 1987, 'Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?'.[17] Drawing on the theories of Chaim Perelman's 'New Rhetoric', socio-linguistics, literary theory, and whatever else he fancies, Wuellner posits a form of rhetorical criticism which corresponds with the movement for a rhetoric revalued or rhetoric reinvented.[18] In this, rhetoric is understood as a practical performance of power inseparable from the social relations in which both the rhetorical act is situated and the rhetorical critic is situated. Wuellner states it as follows:

> ... as rhetorical critics (rhetorics as part of literary theory) we face the obligation of critically examining the fateful interrelationship between (1) a text's rhetorical strategies, (2) the premises upon which these strategies operate (gender in patriarchy or matriarchy; race in social, political power structures), and (3) the efficacy of both text and its interpretation; of both exegetical practice and its theory (= method).[19]

While Wuellner's definition of rhetoric is far from clear, his move away from rhetoric as a way to 'raid the ultimate' or as a way to excavate meaning is obvious.

In the next section, the second part of the appraisal, the preceding survey is analyzed in terms of two underlying assumptions resident in rhetorical critical approaches to the biblical text, textuality and interpretive goals. The analysis will hopefully give a clearer picture of where and over what the war is being fought.

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[16] Kennedy, pp. 10, 12.

[17] Wilhelm Wuellner, 'Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us?' *Catholic Biblical Quaterly* 49 (1987) 448–463, but even in this article there is an endorsement of the work of G. A. Kennedy as a foundation for expanding the notion of rhetorical criticism.

[18] The fullest statement of Wuellner's definition of rhetorical criticism is articulated in, 'Hermeneutics and Rhetorics: From 'Truth and Method' to 'Truth and Power'' *Scriptura S.* 3 (1989) 1–14.

[19] Wuellner, 'Hermeneutics', p. 38.

An Analysis of Rhetorical Approaches to the New Testament Text: the Underlying Assumptions of Textuality and Interpretive Goals

Textuality

In relation to rhetorical criticism and textuality, the question which emerges is what kind of discourse are the New Testament writings? This is obviously a crucial question for a New Testament rhetorical critic. The attempt to answer this question raises a number ofn interesting issues. Some critics of rhetorical criticism note that the classical rhetorical art was applied mainly to speech, and hence may not apply to the multiplicity of literary genres employed in the New Testament.[20] Yet, peculiarly, rhetoric was often learned or practiced by written exercises, so is the application of rhetorical theory to literary texts improper?[21] On the other hand, others argue that the orality of scripture is also a possible interpretive factor for the New Testament text.[22] Prior to orality theory, Funk actually defined the New Testament epistle as structured speech or conversation.[23] But one needs to ask, is this his conclusion for all ancient letters or particularly for New Testament letters? On another track, sociologically, it is questioned whether all the New Testament writings corresponde to ancient rhetoric as it was an art or discipline associated with the educated class of society, the corollary being that some New Testament writings may be sub-literary.[24]

In terms of textuality, then, is the New Testament oral or written discourse, literary or sub-literary discourse? Answers to these questions determine the critical decision about where and how to look for meaning and understanding in the text, and even more basically, about how to determine the rhetorical critical stance in relation to the New Testament text.

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[20] See the critical comments of, C. Clifton Black II, 'Keeping Up with Recent Studies. XVI. Rhetorical Criticism and Biblical Interpretation' *The Expository Times* 100 (1989) 256–257, and Jan Lambrecht, 'Rhetorical Criticism and the New Testament' *Bijdragen* 50 (1989) 245–248.

[21] Brian Vickers, *In Defense of Rhetoric* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1988) pp. 9–13.

[22] Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word,* New Accents (London, Methuen, 1982).

[23] Funk, pp. 237–249.

[24] Lambrecht, p. 246. The issue of the literary quality of the New Testament writings in relation to the culture and class of its day is still debated, F. Gerald Downing, 'A Bas Les Aristos: The Relevance of Higher Literature for the Understanding of the Earliest Christian Writings', *Novum Testamentum* 30 (1988) 212–230.

Rather simplistically, it is easy to classify where the different rhetorical critics situate meaning with regard to the text.[25] Classical rhetorical critics like Betz and Kennedy see meaning as something which lies behind the text and must be excavated from the text based on its historical context. Muilenburg, Wilder, and Funk with their various strategies for 'raiding the ultimate', see the text as a vehicle for a meaning located beyond the text, especially when the text is freed from a primarily historical sense. For Wuellner, the reading of the text in its social context (whether ancient or modern) as a practical exercise of power is the locus for a concept of meaning. As one begins to explore where and how meaning resides in the text from the various rhetorical critical perspectives it emerges that meaning may be singular or polysemous; it may be historically situated, transcendently situated, or practically and socially conditioned.

Certainly many of these analytical demarcations of the various strands of rhetorical criticism are simplistic, but heuristically they accentuate that there are differences. With regard to textuality then, even within the critical practice known as rhetorical criticism it is not a clear-cut matter as to what the text is and in what context the text is meant to operate, nor is it straight-forward as to where the text is meant to lead the critic in terms of meaning.

This leads to the issue of interpretive goals and methods.

Interpretive Goals and Methods

New Testament scholarship, especially since the flood of rhetorical studies which have emerged since Kennedy's book, is in a reflective and reflexive mode. The problem is how to assimilate this burgening critical practice known as rhetorical criticism. It is not unfair to say that the historical paradigm still rules in the guild of New Testament studies.[26] Since this is the case, the goal of recovering and reconstructing the historical scene from which the New Testament texts emerged becomes paramount. This historically reconstructed scene becomes the determinate basis for explaining the text.

Based on this situation in New Testament studies, it is not surprising that most of the reflective articles on rhetorical criticism emphasize the role of the ancient classical rhetorical criticism practiced by Betz, Kennedy, and others.[27] The prioritizing

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[25] The term 'meaning' is an ambigous term in the theory of interpretation. The relationship between interpretive method and a concept of meaning is detailed in, Edgar V. McKnight, *Post-Modern Use of the Bible: The Emergence of Reader-Oriented Criticism* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1988).

[26] See the discussion in, Morgan, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 44 – 200.

[27] For example, Burton L. Mack, *Rhetoric and the New Testament*, Guides to Biblical Scholarship (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1990), and the articles cited in fn. 20.

of this particular stream of rhetorical criticism is natural because it seeks to correlate the text with its supposed original historical context, specifically ancient Hellenistic rhetoric. The act of prioritizing this stream of rhetorical criticism is achieved by focusing on this kind of rhetorical criticism at the expense of other rhetorical critical strategies, and by assimilating the critical practice into the historical paradigm by such conclusions as:

> Whether rhetorical criticism should be presented as an independent, self-sufficient method must be rightly doubted. Perhaps one better sees the new rhetoric as an enriching segment of the larger and more encompassing historical-critical method.[28]

Note that this role assignment of rhetorical criticism protects the guild which then permits a value judgement to be made from the stance of continuing and ensured dominance. In just such a way, the quote immediately continues, „But then as a segment it should be highly respected".[29] In order to demonstrate that assimilation is a concerted practice within the guild, two other quotes are presented:

> Of what benefit, then is rhetorical criticism? A most attractive feature of the method is its position at the cusp of biblical scholarship's older historical concerns and its newer, literary interests. The NT was nurtured in the womb of Roman Hellenism, and rhetoric was integral to that culture's lifeblood. For that reason, rhetorical studies stands alongside source and form criticism, firmly within historical criticism.[30]

> Rhetorical criticism may be in fact the most promising form of literary criticism for the task of reconstructing Christian origins with social issues in view.[31]

Against these retrenchments against rhetoric, there stands two different interpretive goals and methods. One seeks to place rhetorical criticism as an overarching critical perspective which restates the interpretive goal. For instance, though Kennedy is resolutely historical in his textuality, he sees rhetoric as shifting this historical focus from sources and myth-making to the verbal reality of the text and its original persuasive power:

> Rhetoric cannot describe the historical Jesus or identify Matthew or John; they are probably irretrievably lost to scholarship. But it does

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[28] Lambrecht, p. 248.

[29] *Ibid.*

[30] C. Clifton Black II, 'Rhetorical Questions: The New Testament Classical Rhetoric, and Current Interpretation', *Dialog* 29 (1990) 69.

[31] Mack, p. 17

> study a verbal reality, our text of the Bible, rather than the oral sources standing behind that text, the hypothetical stages of its composition, or the impresonal workings of social forces, and at its best it can reveal the power of those texts as unitary messages.[32]

But when he speaks of the text's power, he speaks of the text's rhetoric in classical terms and in its original historical context of author, situation, and audience.

Far more radical is Wilhelm Wuellner, whose advocacy of the priority of rhetorics over hermeneutics not only constitutes the reinvention of rhetoric, but also the complete abandonment of the interpretive task as presently practiced in New Testament studies:

> It made a revolutionary difference to take the familiar notion,that human beings in general, and religious persons in particular, are hermeneutically constituted, and replace it with the ancient notion familiar to Jews and Greeks alike, that we are rhetorically constituted. We have not only the capacity to understand the content or propositions of human signs and symbols (= hermeneutics); we also have the capacity to respond and interact with them (= rhetorics).[33]

For Wuellner and others, the interpretive focus becomes the power of the text to affect, in Kenneth Burke's terms, social identification and transformation in every act of reading.[34]

In terms of interpretive goals and methods, the poles could not be further apart. From one there is the rhetoric of the hegemony of the status quo, the maintaining of the sacred guild which determines the criteria by which a new critical method is allowed in the picture. From the other, there is the radical rhetoric of revolution and reconfiguration, the eclectic grasp for a new constellation. This polarization over defining the nature and role of rhetorical criticism is merely an illustration of the war being waged in New Testament studies over the nature of the text and the scope of the interpretive task.

III. A Proposal for a Rhetorical Critical Approach to the New Testament

The proposal which follows is not meant to provide a peace-treaty for the war. Rather, it, like what has preceded, is a hopeful engagement in the battle. Neither is this proposal an effort at providing a definitive and comprehensive super-method of criticism to meet the peculiar interpretive demands of the New Testament. First, certain ideas

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[32] Kennedy, pp. 158-159.

[33] Wuellner, 'Hermeneutics', p. 38.

[34] Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ, Prentice-Hall, 1950) pp. 49-59.

about the nature and scope of rhetoric in texts are explored. Then, based on these ideas about rhetoric, several possible rhetorical interpretive approaches are suggested.

The Nature and Scope of Rhetoric in Texts

Historically, rhetoric has been understood as an act of persuasion.[35] In that sense rhetoric is an action and a theory about how to achieve that action. In these terms, Chaim Perelman's theory of the 'New Rhetoric' focuses on rhetoric as argumentation, with the argumentative goal being to 'induce or to increase the mind's adherence to the theses presented for its assent'.[36] Similarly, Terry Eagleton's suggestion is that rhetoric is concerned with the kinds of effects which discourses produce, and how they produce them.[37] In both instances, texts are conceived as forms of power and performance at the point of consumption. Rhetorical criticism, then, seeks to lay bare both the means of power and the ways of the performance – to expose the kinds of effects a discourse produces and how they are produced.

The words 'power', 'performance', and 'effect' suggest the possible relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric, a much needed area of re-exploration.[38] Wuellner's separation of rhetoric from and over hermeneutics perhaps is a bit extreme.[39] But rhetoric is distinct from the intersubjectivity of understanding as commonly conceived in hermeneutics and more directly related to what David Klemm calls the 'hermeneutics of existence'.[40] Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith made a provocative suggestion along these lines:

> The primordial function of rhetoric is to 'make-known' meaning both to oneself and to others. Meaning is derived by a human being in and through the interpretive understanding of reality. Rhetoric is the process of making-known that meaning. ... Ontologically speaking, rhetoric shows itself in and through the various ways understanding is interpreted and made known. ... If the hermeneutical situation is the

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[35] Jan Botha, 'On the 'Reinvention' of Rhetoric', *Scriptura* 31 (1989), 10–22.

[36] Ch. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation,* trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1969) p. 4.

[37] Eagleton, p. 205.

[38] See Wuellner, 'Hermeneutics and Rhetorics', also H. Geissner, 'Rhetorik und Hermeneutik', *Rhetorik* 4 (1985) 85–100.

[39] *Ibid.,* pp. 29–38.

[40] David E. Klemm, *Hermeneutical Inquiry, Volume II: The Interpretation of Existence,* American Academy of Religion Studies in Religion 44 (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1986) pp. 1–6.

'reservior' of meaning, then rhetoric is the selecting tool for making known this meaning.[41]

This relationship between hermeneutics and rhetoric pinpoints the social dimension of rhetoric. In Bakhtin's terms, this means rhetorical criticism as a way of reading is not 'a dialogic relationship with an object'.[42] Rhetorical reading constitutes the confrontation between 'two consciousnesses and two subjects' which creates 'contextual meaning' that requires a responsive understanding that includes evaluation.[43] As Brueggemann put it in commenting on the texts regarding Babylon in the OT, „In each case the text is a deliberate act of combat against other views of public reality which live through other forms of rhetoric."[44] But as Habermas might suggest, such rhetorical power works because there exists a community convention to utilize and manipulate in both the sphere of meaning and of expression.[45] But one must be careful here, for the implication is that a social reality exists without the text. Rhetoric is also concerned with the construction/identification of social reality in each linguistic moment.[46] Rhetorical criticism, then, requires an explication of a text's performance in constructing the social context, and in challenging social conventions.

This raises the aspect of the evaluative function of rhetoric. Rhetoric recognizes that no discourse is objectively neutral. The humanistic reconceptione of rhetoric along the lines found in Brian Vicker's, *In Defense of Rhetoric,* and even Perelman's, *The New Rhetoric,* is romantically niave about the ideological, even the theological nature of all discourse.[47] Instead, rhetorical criticism must employ a Platonic suspicion of rhetoric; yet, at the same time, accept the nasty fact that texts (including the critic's sub-texts) as rhetoric are authoritative, power performances with distinct ideological effects. This evaluative side of rhetoric demands that the ethics of interpretation becomes a forthright aspect of critical dialogue. Rhetorical criticism, then, requires that

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[41] Michael J. Hyde and Craig R. Smith, 'Hermeneutics and Rhetoric: A Seen But Unobserved Relationship', *The Quaterly Journal of Speech* 65 (1979) 348, 354.

[42] Mikhail Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays,* University of Texas Press Slavic Series, 8, trans. Vern W. McGee (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1986) p. 144.

[43] Wuellner, 'Hermeneutic', p. 23.

[44] Brueggeman, p. 18.

[45] Jurgen Habermas, 'On Hermeneutics' Claim to Universality', in Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1986) pp. 294–319.

[46] The relationship of discourse (verbal and textual) to social reality is a complex debate. An interesting contribution to the debate is, Michael McGuire, 'The Structural Study of Speech', in Ray E. McKerrow, ed., *Explorations in Rhetoric* (Glenview, IL, Scott Foresman and Company, 1982) pp. 1–22.

[47] G. Kress and R. Hodge, *Language as Ideology* (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979), and F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious, Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London, Methuen, 1981).

a text and its interpretation is accountable for its ethical consequences and political functions.[48]

Rhetorical Critical Interpretive Strategies

Rhetoric and rhetorical criticism conceived as above negates any effort to establish a singular, definitive rhetorical critical method. Wuellner is correct when he says, „Rhetorical criticism is not a set of analytical techniques, not a set of approaches or methods of interpretation, which, when applied, will produce interpretations or solve interpretive problems".[49] But rhetorical criticism as a critical discourse based on rhetorical theory provides a way to establish various interpretive strategies.

It was rhetoric which first recognized the full hermeneutical sphere, what Lausberg calls the *aptum*.[50] The *aptum* concerns the relationships which exist between the speaker, the speech, and the audience, for which one can substitute the figures author, text, and reader. A reader who adopts the rhetorical critical stance, reads a text by constructing or reconstructing the *aptum* and from that analyses and evaluates the effects which discourses produce and how they produce them.

What makes the rhetorical critical perspective potentially effective is that it requires the critic to identify the communication coordinates with which he or she is operating. It also recognizes that the communication event or reading act is altered when an aspect of the *aptum* or one of the reading coordinates changes. This is particularly so with the biblical text as there are several ways to configure the communication coordinates.[51]

Besides the *aptum,* rhetoric posits the role of *ethos, logos* and *pathos* as aspects of the persuasive nature of communication.[52] Traditionally, each of these corresponds with the respective communication poles, speaker, discourse, and audience. What rhetorical criticism maintains is that all communication has these argumentative appeals. There is no communication without all three elements of *ethos, logos,* and

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[48] An advocacy and example of this stance is admirably put forth by, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, 'The Ethics of Interpretation: De-Centering Biblical Scholarship', *Journal of Biblical Literature* 107 (1988) 3–17.

[49] Wuellner, 'Hermeneutics, p. 33.

[50] H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der Litterarischen Rhetorik,* 2 Vols (Munich, M. Hueber, 1960) I, 54ff. and 258, see also Wilhelm Wuellner, 'Paul's Rhetoric of Argumentation in Romans', *Catholic Biblical Quaterly* 38 (1976) 342.

[51] For instance a critic can focus on the historical situation of the historical author and audience, or the literary situation of the implied author and reader, or the reception situation of the modern reader in relation to the text.

[52] Kennedy, pp. 15–16.

pathos.[53] Hence, there is no longer any distinction between philosophy and rhetoric, or at least any prioritizing of *logos,* cum content, over persuasion.[54] Rhetorical criticism encourages the exposure of the various kinds of argumentation or persuasive techniques.

The use of the *aptum* and the three modes of persuasion are only two ways in which rhetorical theory suggest interpretive strategies or ways into the text. The structure or arrangement of texts can be contrasted with the disposition of rhetorical arguments.[55] The effect of texts also can be evaluated against the genres or species of rhetoric.[56]

What is meant by rhetorical criticism? It is the attempt to analyse, interpret, read a literary unit (or text) by analyzing the text in terms of the three relationships of the *aptum* set within the context of a defined rhetorical situation, variously conceived in order to uncover the argumentative or persuasive effect a text creates. Simply put, it examines the way discourses are constructed and operate to create certain effects.

Conclusion: the War Continues

It becomes apparant why the war. Historical-criticism cannot simply assimilate the alternative understanding of text, meaning, and truth which lies at the heart of rhetoric as presented in the above proposal. In the above presentation of rhetorical criticism, texts are not historical artifacts, but dynamic, creative, powerful performances at every reading. Likewise, meaning and truth is not bound to a historical frame-of-reference, or to a transcendent hermeneutical model which locates them outside the text's performance and in the individual's intersubjectivity, or which locates them in a theological realm known as God with a capital 'G'. The truth and power of the text becomes its performance to effect social identification and transformation at each reading of the text.

For one side the war is left undeclared, assimilation is the apparent strategy. For the other side, the war goes on, and the simple refusal by the other side to consider the issues raised by the nature and scope of rhetoric in texts only prolongs the battle. Unfortunately for the New Testament guild, just when they thought they had won the war against literary criticism, the enemy reconfigured itself into a larger and ubiquitious critical practice which takes the critic beyond literary theory to post-structuralism, beyond hermeneutics to post-hermeneutics, beyond rhetoric restrained to rhetoric reinvented.[57]

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[53] Vickers, pp. 148–213.

[54] Wuellner, 'Hermeneutics', pp. 24–33.

[55] Kennedy, pp. 23–25.

[56] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.

[57] Wuellner, 'Where', pp. 448–450, 460–463.

KERRY MCKEEVER

How to Avoid Writing About God

Poststructuralist Philosophers and Biblical Hermeneutics

I would like to begin by relating a story about reading scripture and about readers of scripture that I envision will open the door to discussing the manner in which poststructuralist philosophy, and the subsequent theoretical positions which it has engendered, has already affected and continues to affect biblical hermeneutics. A few years ago Jacques Derrida and I sat on the lawn at the University of California, Irvine, where I was enrolled as a Ph. D. candidate. Derrida asked me about my current research projects, and I replied that I was investigating the Romantic poets' rewritings of biblical narrative. I then began to enumerate the difficulties of reading scripture. I cut my litany short by saying, „Well, you're aware of the problems; you've written on the Bible." Derrida simply smiled and said, „No, I have never written on the Bible." I was puzzled, convinced that he *had* written on the Bible. At the time, however, I was neither bold enough nor confident enough in my theoretical astuteness to question Derrida further.

Nevertheless, my conversation with him has lingered in memory. My readings of Derrida over the years have convinced me that any attempt to encapsulate his work is most probably a fool's errand; like William Blake, Derrida seems to caution us against such an enterprise relative to his writing or anyone else's. On the other hand, I take seriously his desire to wrest meaning from the clutch of institutions; I believe in the efficacy of his claim that we should recognize the degree to which our ideas are framed by and received from these institutions. Ironically, writing about Derrida or indeed any poststructuralist thinker runs the risk of replicating the errors of structural relation which he has struggled against so mightily for over two decades. I don't think that it is unfair to say that the writing industry which has been created out of the debate about deconstruction profoundly blurs the distinction between poststructuralist theory and its sometimes skewed interpretation and use. Certainly, the notion that deconstructive methodology is essentially negative and sends us careening down a path of infinite regression does not coincide with my experience. My awareness of the complications of writing on poststructuralist positions has made me especially cautious in my pondering of the philosophical positioning of these thinkers relative to the Bible specifically and theology in general.

Besides revealing the extent of my intellectual naiveté, my conversation with Derrida led me to consider how, if Derrida had not written on the Bible (and indeed he has not) I received the impression that he had. Perhaps even more important, this brief scholarly encounter steered me toward a more basic meditation, for it was through reading Derrida and the works of other poststructuralist thinkers that I had become interested in a study of biblical texts in the first place. Again, many theologians and literary critics alike might find Derrida's works a slightly more than eccentric route to

biblical study, especially in the wake of the severest critiques of his deconstructive method, which in certain domains is discerned as a menace to Western culture, and, more specifically for our purposes here, as a caveat to religious institutions and the sacred texts which individuals within these establishments interpret in the name of a particular spiritual, cultural, or political agenda.

The dimensions of this threat, which extend beyond academia to the popular media, have been discussed recently by Mario J. Valdes in his response to George Will's comment in a recent issue of *Newsweek* that deconstruction is an attack on the meaning of literary works by means of a denial of the authority of literature.[1] Will further contends that consequently deconstructive critics replace authors as the bestowers of meaning. Valdes responds to these charges by indicating that

> „... in deconstruction textual meaning is not attacked; rather, the notion of a fixed meaning is put into question, so that critical authority passes from the institutionalized received interpretations to the reader. Deconstructive criticism therefore does not substitute itself for the literary text but quite modestly takes up a supplementary role. Meaning is thus not the exclusive province of the critic who purportedly interpreted what the author „really had in mind." ... if we step back a bit from present-day polemics we will recognize that deconstruction derives from an ancient form of skepticism that questions all interpretations. ... I submit that the collective voice of today's literary scholars is a threat only to a complacent nostalgia for a cultural fantasy that never existed."[2]

The path of my readings – in the philosophy of deconstruction in particular and poststructuralist theory in general – toward a study of biblical interpretation was occasioned by a contemporary form of this ancient skepticism, not in theology or in interpretation in itself, but in what might be called the „hermeneutical fantasy", or the mode by which hermeneutics and the resultant interpretive gestures can become reified into doctrine. By means of extension, I was also interested in the ways that challenges to institutionalized doctrine frequently generate a deep and often desperate fear that such confrontations precipitate the collapse of religious faith rather than produce a more positive belief that such challenges can actually provide a healthy stimulus to faith.

The results of my meditations on these issues are, in part, presented in this essay. However, a thorough investigation into the effect of poststructuralist theory on biblical hermeneutics would necessarily involve discussing many elements of both writing and reading which loom too large for the space here: we would have to recall the manner in which poststructuralist theories have problematized the foundationalist elements of hermeneutical structures; we would again have to present these elements

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[1] Will, G. April 1991, „Literary Politics." *Newsweek*, Vol. 22, 72.

[2] Valdes, M. J., Winter 1991, „Deconstruction and Debate," *MLA Newsletter*, Vol. 23, No. 4, 2–3.

for debate, since concepts such as representation, structure, writing, authority, discourse, narrative, figurative language, interpretation, intention, determinacy, value, influence, rhetoric, culture, canon, gender, race, ethnicity and ideology have undergone radical refigurings in the wake of poststructuralist thought.

Instead, I would like to present one example of the manner in which two poststructuralist thinkers, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida, have responded in part to a problem posed throughout the history of biblical interpretation: the nature of the human relationship to the divine, what might otherwise be defined as God's „place" or „work" relative to humanity. I will further limit my discussion by locating these responses relative to the poststructuralist reception of this question as it was partially addressed by two pre-modern philosophers. The first is Descartes as described by Jacques Lacan, who views Descartes' non-atheistic repudiation of God's „work" as a denial of our ability to establish a non-theological relation with the divine.

> „In effect, Descartes inaugurates the initial bases of a science in which God has nothing to do. For the characteristic of our science, and its difference with the ancient sciences, is that nobody even dares, without incurring ridicule, to wonder whether God knows anything about it, whether God leafs through modern treatises on mathematics to keep up to date. (...) Can psychoanalysis be situated in our science, in so far as this science is considered as that in which God has nothing to do?"[3]

The second is Nietzsche, who opened the door to what has often been referred to as „the death of God" in his suggestion that the God configured by man is obsolete. These philosophical positions present poststructuralist philosophers with a rather intriguing problem. That is to say, once one has seemingly created unemployment and then death for God, has misplaced or displaced God, where does one go from there?

I mention this problem of God's „placement" here because how God is „placed" (in the sense of the *topos* of God) is one of the foundational issues for almost any biblical hermeneutic. The rhetorical resources which we commonly assume to be the foundation of hermeneutics are actually nothing more (or less) than resources for arguing any espoused positionality of God; they cannot function as guarantors of „correct" interpretation, although they are often presented as so. Instead, hermeneutics makes available to the disputants of biblical interpretation some additional rhetorical tactics for continuing the arguments over meaning. The rhetorical effectiveness of each hermeneutic depends upon the acceptability of the relevant hermeneutic theories that constitute these sources as guide for correct interpreting. Thus, the removal of God as speaking and, concomitantly, engaging subject sets the background for the current turn

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[3] Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Hogarth Press, 1977) 226-7.

towards the divine in critical theory. The effort is toward „re-placing" God in order to establish a hermeneutic appropriate to this „re-placement".

This turn, not surprisingly, has been accompanied by a resurgence of the fragmentary mode, which has been used by Maurice Blanchot as a mode of access to the question of the divine, or for Jean Francois Lyotard as a mark of the break with „a persistent piety of the Passion of and for truth in history" which inaugurates a postmodern epoch of „pagan narrativity". But perhaps the most intriguing use of the fragment and the most fruitful to discuss for our purposes is the work of Jean-Luc Nancy in „Noli me frangere", on which he collaborated with Philippe Lacoue-Labarthes, and his later essay, „Of divine places". In this later essay, Nancy describes the difficulty inherent in talking about God:

> „'God', the motif or theme of God, the question of God, no longer means anything to us. Or else – as is all too obvious to an unbiased eye – what the theme of 'God' might mean to us has already moved or been carried entirely outside of him. Is there any statement about the divine which can henceforth be distinguished, strictly speaking, from another about ... 'the subject' (or its 'absence'), 'desire', 'history', 'others' *[autrui]*, 'the Other', 'being', 'speech', *[la parole]* 'the sublime', 'community', and so on and so forth? It is as if 'God' were in fragments, an Osiris dismembered throughout all of our discourse ... as if the divine, God or the gods formed the common name or place – common and as such erasable, insignificant – of every question, every exigency of thought: wherever thought comes up against the furthest extreme, the limit, against truth, or ordeal *[l'epreuve']* in short, wherever it thinks, it encounters something which once bore, or seems to have borne, at one time or another, a divine name."[4]

Nancy continues by suggesting that in fact there is „no theology which does not turn out here to be either ontological or anthropological – saying *nothing about the god* which cannot immediately by said about 'event', about 'love', about 'poetry'." The point of thought in the current age, suggests Nancy, is wresting from theology the

> „prerogative of talking about the Other, the Infinitely-other, the Other-Infinite. It is taking away from theology the privilege of expressing the *absconditum* of experience and discourse. In so doing, perhaps the modern age secretly corresponds to the true destination of a *theology:* for it indicates to theology that, in order to speak of God, we have to speak of something other than the Other, the Abstruse and their infinite remoteness..." (7)

Here, Nancy clearly indicates that our efforts to „re-place" God must be essentially a resistance to placement, since any placement locates God within the realm of language,

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[4] Nancy, J. 1986, „of divine places", *Paragraph*, Vol. 1, 1–52.

or within the realm of the proper noun. This, certainly, is not a new position: we have confronted it often enough in the writings of Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Albert the Great, Meister Eckhart, and Levinas, among many others. But what Nancy argues more specifically in his response to the Cartesian dilemma is the importance of the positionality of the speaking subject, the manner in which the speaker is dictated by the *noli me frangere,* is exhorted not to think actively at all, but to abdicate the position of the subject of discourse altogether so as not to permit a relation to the divine to take place.[5] In short, as Michael Holland suggests in his introduction to Nancy's essay, „fragmentation is not the result of active intervention in discourse by a subject alert to the divine: it is the mark of the abdication of that subject". Holland thus marks the manner in which the terrain of Nancy's position differs from that of negative theologians. And, as Holland subsequently suggests,

> „The substance of fragmentary discourse will not emanate from the nominal subject of such discourse. Nancy will say nothing original about the divine. Indeed, his discourse in one sense has no substance at all: it merely rewrites existing discourses on the divine according to its own dangerously fragile mode, and in so doing opens them out towards a post-theoretical epoch of relation. The text which follows is a tissue of other discourses on the divine, an immense exercise in restatement without stasis, which seeks to turn the practice of writing into the very event and advent of what discourse seemed condemned interminably to frustrate: inter-relation." (3)

The inter-relatedness that is at the heart of postrstructuralist discourse is also one of the keys for understanding how Derrida does *not* write about the Bible. Derrida, much in the manner described by Nancy, secedes his position as subject of discourse and further secedes his position as hermeneutical interpreter of biblical text. The result is a relationality that is not easily articulated; however, recalling some of Derrida's essential principles in order to comprehend how his views on writing have formulated the basis for his positioning relative to biblical texts is helpful.

In 1967 Derrida published three major texts devoted to the question of writing: *Writing and Difference, Of Grammatology,* and *Speech and Phenomena.* Derrida's project in these writings is to revaluate the structuring principles of Western metaphysics. Part of Derrida's undertaking has been his concern with the underlying assumptions of Western philosophy, which according to Derrida has analyzed the world in terms of binary oppositions: mind vs. body, good vs. evil, man vs. woman, presence vs. absence. Derrida demonstrates the hierarchical arrangement of these oppositions, indicating that the first term is privileged over the second. According to Derrida, the opposition

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[5] Lacoue-Labarthes, P. and Nancy, J. 'Noli me frangere', *Revue des sciences humaine,* 185 (1982), 84–92.

between speech and writing has a similar structure: speech is seen as immediacy, presence, life, and identity, whereas writing is seen as deferment, absence, death and difference. This privileging of speech as self-present meaning is denoted by Derrida as „logocentrism".

However, as Derrida recognizes, paradoxically Western tradition is charged with writing that privileges speech. The Bible is no exception to this privileging, since it is constituted as the *word* of God dictated to and written down by God's agents. What his analyses reveal is that even when a text tries to privilege speech as immediacy, it cannot completely eliminate the fact that speech, like writing, is based on a *différance* between signifier and signified inherent in the sign. Speakers do not transmit meanings directly from one mind to another. Immediacy is illusory since traits commonly associated with writing inescapably creep into arguments designed to privilege speech.

One of the most prevalent and obvious examples of this principle in biblical text occurs in the giving of the commandments to Moses. God first the *writes* tablets with his finger; after the first set of commandments are destroyed, God then dictates the „law" to Moses, and the tablets were to contain the words that were on the first tables (*Exodus* 24: 12–14; cf. *Deuteronomy* 10: 1–5.) God then dictates the tablets to Moses, and it is these dictated tablets, preserved in man's writing, that formulate the basis of the law. Moreover, the representation of the law as original is further undercut by the difference between the first set of laws and the second, between the spiritual and cultic law. Thus, access to God's „speech" is obtained by observing the structure of writing. This emphasis on writing as a viable representation, indeed the only representation, of the „Word" is designed to counter the history of logocentrism and to track the functioning of *différance* in structures of signification.

Thus, the logic of writing is properly double: writing is called upon as a necessary panacea for *différance,* but at the same time it *is* the very *différance* for which a cure must be sought. In Derrida's analysis of writing, which is also an analysis of reading, this logic is called the logic of the *supplément,* in French, signifying both an „addition" and a „substitute". The Bible as such functions in a supplementary fashion in so far as it simultaneously bridges and widens the gap between God and the narrator of the text, between God and the interpreter of the text.

Derrida's epigraph to *Writing and Difference,* taken from Mallarmé, also helps us to comprehend his relationality to texts, in this case biblical texts: „Le tout sans nouveauté qu'un espacement de la lecture"("All without innovation except for a certain spacing-out of reading.") Derrida, like Mallarmé, gives a signifying function to the materiality of writing. This attention includes consideration of margins, typefaces, blank spaces, titular material, etc., as well as tracking syntactic and semantic ambiguities in such a way as to generate multiple, often conflicting, meanings out of a single utterance. For Derrida, this process does not lead to the infinite regression of meaning but,

instead, to a „fleshing out" of meaning, a revelation of the stunning manner in which multiple meanings respond to the variety of forms as they exist in human thought.

In Derrida's terms, biblical hermeneutics would involve following the „other" logics of structures of signification inscribed in writing as a means to a celebration of this variety. His reading involves taking seriously the elements that a standard reading disregards, overlooks, or edits out. Finally, and singularly important to our understanding of Derrida's position to biblical texts, is the fact that Derrida always writes *about* texts, *around,* them, as it were, rather than *on* them. This style is meticulously developed in all of his writing, but I would like to present two examples here. The first demonstrates how Derrida „places" God relative to man via Derrida's reading of Edmund Jabès; the second reveals how Derrida's reading of a biblical text serves as one of the foundations for what might be described as his approach to all texts.

In the first essay in *Writing and Difference* entitled „Force and Signification", Derrida positions God in a radical manner. He asks (or states):

> „Is not that which is called God, that which imprints every human course and recourse with its secondarity, the passageway of deferred reciprocity between reading and writing? or the absolute witness to the dialogue in which what one sets out to write has already been read, and what one sets out to say is already a response, the third party as the transparency of meaning? Simultaneously part of creation and the Father of Logos. The circularity and traditionality of Logos. The strange labor of conversion and adventure in which grace can only be that which is missing." (11)

Derrida continues by quoting a letter written by Mallarmé to Verlaine:

> „I will go even further and say: the Book, for I am convinced that there is only One, and that is has [unwittingly] been attempted by every writer, even by Geniuses. ... revealing that, in general, all books contain the amalgam of a certain number of age-old truths; that actually there is only one book on earth, that it is the law of the earth, the earth's true Bible. The difference between individual works is simply the difference between individual interpretation of one true and established text, which are proposed in a mighty gathering of the ages we call civilized or literary." (10)

If God is the „deferred reciprocity" of interpretation, and if all texts are attempts to rewrite the „One Book", then our efforts to interpret any writing become attempts to comprehend the Bible and our relationship with God. Derrida makes this clear in his essay on Edmund Jabès, and his esposual of Jabès' position that the book is always also an interrogation of God, of God's interrogation of Himself, since writing is always already His:

> „God separated himself from himself in order to let us speak, in order to astonish and to interrogate us. He did so not by speaking but by keeping still,

> by letting silence interrupt his voice and his signs, by letting the Tables be broken. In *Exodus* God repented and said so at least twice, before the first and before the new Table, between original speech and writing and, within Scripture, between the original and repetition (*Exodus* 32:14; 33:17). Writing is, thus, originally hermetic and secondary. Our writing, certainly, but already His, which starts with the stifling of his voice and the dissimulation of his Face. This difference, this negativity in God is our freedom, the transcendence and the verb which can relocate the purity of their negative origin only the possibility of the Question."[6] (67)

The relationship between the stifling of God's voice and man's writing – between originality and secondarity – presents itself here as the tension between pronouncement and negativity; Derrida's struggle in part is his attempt to move beyond this binary system. The problem is demonstrated effectively later in the same essay:

> „If absence is the heart of the question, if separation can emerge only in the rupture of God – with God – if the infinite distance of the Other is *respected* only within the sands of a book in which wandering and mirages are always possible, then *Le livre des questions* is simultaneously the interminable song of absence and a book on the book. Absence attempts to produce itself in the book and is lost in being pronunced; it knows itself as disappearing and lost, and to this extent it remains inaccessible and impenetrable. To gain access to it is to lose it; to show it is to hide it; to acknowledge it is to lie."[7]

For Derrida, the concern is very much one of *respect:* respect for the divine and the sacred. This deference requires an erasure of hermeneutics as we know it: to approach the Bible as our interrogation of God and His interrogation of Himself necessitates that the question forget itself „within the articulations of memory, the time of its interrogation, the time and tradition of its *sentence.* ..."[8]

Hermeneutics becomes heuristics and interpretation the means by which we establish an inter-relatedness with the divine, on the „broken line between lost and promised speech", in the furrow that we create when we must become people of vision, workers outside the garden and the immediacy of God's voice.[9] And the approach involves widening out the space of sacred literature; in fact, it is a sacralizing of all written words: a privileging of secondarity over originality, of the „other" texts of the

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[6] Derrida, J., „Edmund Jabes and the Question of the Book", in *Writing and Difference;* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978) 64 – 78.

[7] Ibid., 69.

[8] Ibid., 78.

[9] Ibid., 68.

Bible in order to accomplish a secession of the hermeneutic self so that an encounter with the divine and the sacred may take place through the absence of confrontation.

Nowhere is this model for writing and its relationship to the divine demonstrated as superbly as it is in Derrida's essay „Shibboleth", where his reading of Judges 12:5–6. serves not only as the basis of his reading of Paul Celan but also as a means of understanding how Derrida applies his complex perception of heuristic practice.[10] For my purposes here, I would like to step back from Derrida's analysis of Celan and concentrate on the ways in which the essay serves as a demonstration of Derrida's practice of writing, especially as it concerns biblical texts.

Judges tells us that „Shibboleth" is the Hebrew word used by Jepthah by which he and his men distinguished the fleeing Ephraimites, who could not pronounce the *sh,* from his own men, the Gileadites. As such, „Shibboleth" is an application of a principle of inclusion and exclusion, a peculiarity or accent indicative of a person's origin or exclusion from origin. Derrida underscores the point that the failure of the Ephraimites was not in comprehending the *meaning* of the word, but in a bodily failure to respond to the diacritical difference between *Shibboleth* and *Sibboleth.* Derrida ties his reading of the „incommunicable secret of the Judaic idiom, the singularity of its „unpronounceable name" to the nature of the Judaic God, and to what it means to be a Jew":

> „The Jew's „unpronunceable name" says so many things: it says *Shibboleth,* the word which is unpronounceable – which *can* not be pronounced – by one who does not partake of the covenant or alliance; it says the name of God which *must* not be pronounced; and it says also the name of the Jew which the non-Jew has *trouble* pronouncing and which he scorns or destroys for that very reason, which he expels as foreign and uncouth, or which he replaces with a derisory name which is easier to pronounce. ... Its unpronounceability keeps and destroys the name; it keeps it, like the name of God, or dooms it to annihilation. And these two possibilities are not simply different or contradictory." (338)

For Derrida, if we follow the logic of his relation to all texts, language itself becomes the unpronounceable, a trace or „cinder" of the forgotten voice within the garden, an interiorization of death and the Fall in memory. The Bible as such can be construed as a sepulcher, a work of mourning in which is encrypted the lost origin of speech, „that which preserves in order no longer to preserve, dooming the remnant to dissolution."[11] And to read the Bible is also to circumcise it: Derrida translates „circumcision as a „reading-wound", as an act which signifies both

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[10] Derrida, J., „Shibboleth", in *Midrash and Literature,* eds. G. Hartman and S. Budick, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press) 307–347.

[11] Derrida, J., *Cinders* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1987) 35.

> „the surgical act of cutting, and the state, quality, or condition of being circumcised. In this second sense, one may speak of the circumcision of a word or utterance, as one also speaks of the concision of a discourse, its being-circumcised or circumscribed."[12]

The Bible is circumcised both in terms of its canonical history, which enacts in the manner of the *shibboleth* a pattern of exclusion or inclusion, and in terms of its interpretation, which enacts the „reading-wounding" of which Derrida speaks. The „shibboleth" marks the passageway of „deferred reciprocity" that is God and interpretation, and the guest or interpreter is an Elijah who must be present at all circumcisions, at all reading-wounds. In terms of his own text, Derrida's situating of „Shibboleth" as his title circumcises his own essay, marking the territory between the pronounceable and the unpronounceable in writing, inscribing in the margins the terrain of a passageway between his meditations on Celan, his readings of the Bible, his understanding of the problematic natur. of Jewish identity and the larger enigma of man's relationship to God.

Derrida's insistence that he does not write on the Bible is thus a silence enforced by the regulations of his philosophical stance. Silence and denial – a withdrawal or secession from the position of speaking subject relative to the divine – is exactly that which enables a negative attendance to the divine, just as his readings of Mallarmé, Verlaine, Jabès (indeed, every writer he has confronted) are the means by which he always *attends* toward the biblical text without attending it. Such deferral dislodges the boundaries of hermeneutical discourse so that they can include the non-canonical or all texts which must always speak to the „one Book".

The somewhat midrashic nature of poststructuralist discourse admits to an authority but also denies access to authority through its own discursive structures. Such discursive structures, when disseminated throughout a culture, threaten the plethora of institutions which rely on traditional hermeneutic strategies to enforce, regulate and perpetuate a variety of agendas. It is no surprise in light of this skepticism that the forceful impact of poststructuralism on culture has been received with such trepidation. Poststructuralist methodology, then, offers itself as a challenge to the community of biblical scholars, regardless of their affiliations with any given discipline or hermeneutic. This invitation is, first, an invocation to examine our political positions as speaking subjects relative to biblical interpretation; second, to resist the desire to retreat defensively behind hermeneutical walls which such analysis engenders; and, third, to engage in a discourse both hermeneutic and heuristic, both structured and playful, where meaning can reside not within a given discourse, but in the passageway of deferred reciprocity that is interpretation, where God resides and where He listens to us speak.

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[12] "Shibboleth", 343.

BERNARD M. LEVINSON

The Case for Grounding Biblical Hermeneutics upon the Diachronic Method

The range of methodologies now evident in contemporary biblical scholarship suggests a discipline in the process of change. New methodologies are emerging to take their place alongside more established ones and even to call older models into question. As methodologies proliferate, biblical texts may be interpreted from many different perspectives: linguistic, historical, comparative Near Eastern, social-scientific, source-critical, form-critical, literary, rhetorical, ideological, feminist, liberation-theological, canon-critical, and so on. Such theoretical and methodological flux makes it imperative to attempt some critical evaluation, perhaps best achived by rejecting change for its own sake and by reflecting directly upon the question, „What is the direction that a future biblical hermeneutics should take?" This essay attempts to contribute toward that process of evaluation from the perspective of current trends in scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. Within that field, while many scholars continue to employ conventional diachronic methods grounded in philology, history, or archaeology, other scholars urge a type of methodological flip-flop, rejecting historical criticism in favor of the newer literary approach which is synchronic in orientation.

These two basic orientations vary in their assumptions about the nature of the biblical text. The diachronic method associated with classical biblical studies assumes the text to be the product of multiple authors and consequently aims to reconstruct the compositional history of the text. In contrast, the newer synchronic approach eschews conventional source-criticism. Instead, it regards the biblical text as the coherent product of authorial intentionality, similar to a contemporary literary creation, full of irony, complexity, and ambiguity, and raising issues of voice and point of view: an intricate aesthetic masterprice.

Three things are important to underscore concerning the impact of the newer literary approach. First, it has already had a strong demographic effect on the discipline. Increasing numbers of the younger voices within the discipline, many of the most interesting voices, and most of the feminist voices, employ the synchronic method. Second, it has hermeneutical implications. In many cases, the literary method becomes the vehicle for, not merely an analysis of the aesthetic structure of biblical narrative, but generalizations about the type of society and the habits of mind that produced the narrative. The literary method thereby often pursues the same goal as the older biblical theologies: by means of textual exegesis, to speak with authority about ancient Israelite culture, ethics and religion. The obvious difficulty that arises, however, is the arbitrarily delimited textual base of such a „narrative theology". Third, this approach also has the most impact upon the work of non-specialists in shaping their understanding of the biblical text. For example, scholars working in the areas of literary, philosophical, or

religious hermeneutics are more likely to be familiar with the work of Robert Alter or Meir Sternberg than with that of S. R. Driver, Otto Eissfeldt, or Moshe Weinfeld. For all these reasons, the literary method represents an important future direction of biblical studies.

The question which I wish to pose in this essay, however, which by now should be obvious, is whether this new direction in biblical studies provides an adequate model for a future biblical hermeneutics. Strikingly, to the best of my knowledge, although much vitriol has been exchanged, little work has been done to explore the intellectual origins, the methodological implications, and the hermeneutical presuppositions of the synchronic method. In order to explore some of these issues, I will refer to the impressive recent volume by Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*.[1] Sternberg's work represents one of the most theoretically and methodologically sophisticated literary studies of the Bible that has appeared in recent decades. It is everywhere intellectually engaged and makes important theoretical claims, the most profound of which is Sternberg's striking assertion that the Hebrew Bible is essentially modern in the sophistication and complexity of the interpretive demands it places upon its readers.

Taking Sternberg's book as emblematic of the new literary approach at its theoretical best, I will attempt to demonstrate that the synchronic method contradicts its own mandate.[2] By rejecting diachronic analysis as essentially irrelevant, the synchronic method cannot achieve its avowed goal of providing a coherent reading or an adequate conceptualization of the biblical text. I will base my claim upon a close reading of the biblical flood story, attempting to demonstrate that the synchronic method alone cannot articulate the hermeneutical issues raised by this fascinating narrative. To the contrary, not only is the conventional diachronic method essential to a coherent reading of that narrative, it moreover brings into focus precisely those textual issues – voice, authorship, and authority – that the newer literary critics should find most engaging. Before turning to the flood story, however, it is important to examine Sernberg's work in more detail and thereby to set the literary approach within its larger context in intellectual history.

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[1] Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); subsequent references will be provided in parentheses.

[2] In fairness, I must of course emphasize that not all proponents of a „literary" method concur with Sternberg's claims. For a particularly sharp rejection of his approach to Genesis 34, see Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn, „Tipping the Balance: Sternberg's Reader and the Rape of Dinah", *Journal of Biblical Literature* 110 (1991) 193–211. Notwithstanding such debate, my larger argument remains valid. Although Fewell and Gunn question aspects of the ideology that Sternberg attributes to Israelite authors, they do not dispute his synchronic conception of the text.

Sternberg opens his book with the following questions: „What goals does the biblical narrator set himself? What is it that he wants to communicate in this or that story, cycle, book? What kind of text is the Bible, and what roles does it perform in context?" (p. 1.) These questions, with their focus on the communicative intent of the Hebrew Bible, lay the conceptual and methodological foundations for Sternberg's overall interpretive project. He attempts to provide a prescriptive model for how the study – not just the literary study – of biblical narrative should be carried out. He calls for a methodological shift from the paradigm of a diachronic genetics to that of a synchronic poetics, from *genesis* to *poesis* (p. 68.), in order to permit a coherent exposition of the text and its significance.

Sternberg's methodology involves a well-justified double critique: both of conventional critical scholarship, for being exclusively concerned with establishing the historical context out of which the Bible emerges, and of his precursors in the new literary approach, for so denying the relevance of that context that the innovative force of the Bible's narrative strategies is lost. Properly recognizing that biblical study „is the intersection of the humanities par excellence" (p. 21.), Sternberg attempts to avoid the double reduction of the text either to its origins or to a decontextualized, merely self-referential closed system. He urges instead a reading of Israelite narrative conventions in the light of comparative literary history, with reference to Ancient Near Eastern antecedents as well as to the post-biblical versions. By means of such comparative studies, Sternberg highlights the distinctiveness of biblical narrative, showing the generic conventions of cuneiform literature which Israelite writers transform or how the versions often expunge the interpretive difficulties posed by the Hebrew text.

Despite this valuable use of literary history, however, Sternberg's actual analysis of the biblical text is exclusively synchronic. He makes the sole focus of his work the narrator as the reflex of the author; the text is construed as a compositional unity, the product of the artistic control of its author. This approach permits Sternberg to recover the narrative rules underlying the text's composition. As such, although Sternberg is concerned with history to a far greater extent than many other practitioners of the newer literary approach to the Bible, his explication of the text is synchronic rather than diachronic: his expositions never refer to an editor or redactor or view the text as deriving from multiple hands.

Sternberg nominally invokes modern or post-modern literary theory – using the terminology of *poetics* – to formulate his synchronic method. His rhetoric, indeed that used by all proponents of the new literary approach, is that classical historical criticism has become outmoded, obsolete, even retrograde. I contend, to the contrary, that the new synchronic approach in fact moves even further back in time, behind the emergence of the modern historical-critical method, prior to the emergence of secular biblical interpretation altogether, to a fundamentally pre-modern hermeneutic. In much of its

fundamental orientation to the biblical text, the synchronic method actually represents the old wine of classic and medieval rabbinic hermeneutics aestheticized within the new skins of contemporary literary theory.[3] Sternberg borrows from rabbinic conceptions of the text's coherence and the purposiveness of its details to restore to biblical studies a concern with meaning – with what and how the text communicates – often absent in critical scholarship.

The use of the pre-modern method in the attempt to break free of the historical-critical method involves several problems however. Precisely the textual evidence that points to human authorship and creativity is discounted or explained away by classical rabbinic hermeneutics, which works with a different set of assumptions concerning the composition and structure of the biblical text. The conception of Scripture as a self-consistent, revealed plenum means that rabbinic exegesis is constrained to deny the very human literary history that, according to modern scholarship, brought the Pentateuch into being. Textual difficulties – grammatical anacoluthons, redundancies, inconsistencies or contradictions of content, scribal errors, obscure formulations – do not point to multiple – human – authorship of the Pentateuch, the various strata of which differ in their historical accounts, legal requirements, stylistic usage, and in their conceptions of divine and human.

Such textual *aporia,* which arise from the historical vicissitudes of the text's composition and transmission, are instead explained by rabbinic hermeneutics in purposive or homiletical terms. Indeed, the point of departure for all rabbinic interpretation is the denial of literary history within the Pentateuch: „There is neither early nor late in the Torah."[4] This synchronic assertion in effect functions to save the coherence of the text. It becomes problematic for hermeneutics to recognize accretion, contradiction, revision, or redundancy within a Scripture that provides the ground for a comprehensive body of divinely revealed *halakhah* (religious law). Rabbinic midrashic rather explains these textual phenomena as having a didactic purpose or as referring to separate narrative or legal cases. In effect, „There is neither redundancy nor contradiction in the Torah." The textual stumbling blocks thereby provide opportunities

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[3] Two recent volumes emphasize the continuity between Rabbinic midrash and comteporary literary theory: S. A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (SUNY Series on Modern Jewish Literature; Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982) and D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

[4] The dictum is Tannaitic. See its repeated exegetical application in *Mekhilta, Beshalah* 7 (on Exod. 15:9) in the edition of H. Horowitz and I. Rabin, *Mekhilta d'Rabbi Ishmael* (Jerusalem: Bamberger and Wahrmann, 1960) 139. See also *Siphre Num., Behaʿaloteka,* 64 in the edition of H. S. Horowitz, *Siphre D'be Rab* (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1966) 61. In the Talmud see *y. Šeqal.* 6.1; *y. Sota* 5.3; *b. Pesaḥ.* 6b.

for interpretation, proof of the plenitude of reference planted in the text by its divine Author.

The motivations for the new literary approach's embrace of an older textual hermeneutic should be clear: the understandable nostalgia to recover a scriptural text that retains its integrity, profundity, and power to move and challenge its readers. Notwithstanding these valid goals, many modern readers may fail to recognize that the historical-critical method was itself developed for reasons of equal existential and theological significance. The hard-fought emergence of historical criticism was itself an attempt to liberate – both the scriptural text and its reader – from the hegemony of fossilized dogmas of biblical interpretation.

These issues emerge most sharply through consideration of the work of Benedict Spinoza, widely recognized as the father of the historical-critical method. Already in 1670, Spinoza drew on scattered hints in medieval rabbinic commentaries to provide a reading of the Hebrew Bible which candidly asserts its profusion of inner contradictions as well as the post-Mosaic origins of the Pentateuch. For this reason, Spinoza's biblical analysis in the first fifteen chapters of the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*[5] is correctly understood to be crucial for the later, more systematic elaboration of the historical-critical method.[6] Almost without exception, however, Spinoza's philological and literary-critical work in these chapters is taken out of context, both by philosophers and by biblical scholars. The former assume that Spinoza's aim was to void the biblical text of significance and authority. In reading his work this way, they fail to recognize the essential religious structure of his larger hermeneutical position.[7] In contrast, biblical

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[5] R. H. M. Elwes, trans., *The Chief Works of Benedict de Spinoza* (2 vols.; New York: Dower, 1951) 1. 1–199. Subsequent references to Spinoza will be placed in parentheses in the text.

[6] On Spinoza's contributions, see H. J. Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des AltenTestaments* (2d ed.; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1969) 61–65. In immerdiate terms, the great advances in nineteenth century scholarship derive from the contributions of W. M. L. de Wette, who is the first „to use the critical method in order to present a view of the history of Israelite religion that is radically at variance with the view implied in the Old testament itself." See J. Rogerson, *Old Testament Criticism in the Nineteenth Century: England and Germany* (London: SPCK, 1984) 29. At a more fundamental level, however, Spinoza's work is crucial for his concerted rejection of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch and his demonstration of textual corruptions and historical and conceptual inconsistencies within the Bible. As such Spinoza helps found and legitimate the historical and secular approach to Scripture; see L. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken, 1965) 35.

[7] Most treatments of Spinoza reject his work as inimical to any notion of a biblically grounded hermeneutics; L. Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion,* is the most obvious example. I know of only one illuminating approach that integrates Spinoza's biblical exegesis with his larger philosophical project. See B. Polka, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique* (New York: St. Martin's, 1986) 21–22, 25–27, 184–187; idem „Spinoza and the Separation between Philosophy and Theology", *Journal of Religious Studies* 16 (1990) 91–119; idem, „Spinoza's Concept of Biblical Interpretation", paper presented to the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Rome, July 14–17, 1991.

scholars seeking the origins of the historical-critical method, tend to concentrate only on the earlier chapters which are explicitly concerned with philological and historical issues. As a result they produce a form of biblical criticism that lacks a larger intellectual, ethical, and hermeneutical framework. Specifically, conventional biblical scholars tend to overlook the function of chapters XVI–XX in the *Tractatus,* those chapters in which Spinoza provides the theory for a prototypically modern democratic state founded upon the rights of free thought and expression.

The latter chapters, whose concern is freedom, share a common conceptual structure with the earlier chapters, whose concern is biblical hermeneutics. Spinoza argues in chapters I–XV that neither philosophy nor theology[8] should be subordinate to the other, that neither the reader nor the biblical text should be subordinate to the other, that neither the individual nor the state should be subordinate to the other. He attempts to grant each autonomy, respect, and freedom in relation to the other. Spinoza's concern is to permit the reader to deal with the biblical text on its own terms and thereby to emancipate the Bible from two forms of alien hermeneutics: first, the reduction of theology to philosophical truth (the requirement by Maimonides that the Bible conform to the laws of identity and non-contradiction that derive from Greek philosophy) and, second, the reduction of philosophy to theological truth (the requirement by Judah Ibn Alfakhar that the reader unquestioningly subordinate his or her critical intelligence to the authority of the biblical text).[9] Spinoza argues that the contradictions that cannot but engage the Bible's attentive reader must not be explained away through allegorical exegesis (Maimonides) nor be used to contradict reason itself (Alfakhar). Nor do they render the text itself false (unprofitable) at the level of meaningfulness. The need to establish and legitimate an autonomous biblical hermeneutics has as its counterpart the need to legitimate the individual's right of free expression with respect to the state, which Spinoza defends in chapters XVI–XX. Although the individual participates in a political contract, Spinoza acutely argues, the intent of such participation is to permit, not supress, „free reason and judgment" (p. 259). The sovereignty of the state does not preclude the autonomy of the individual. „No one can ever so utterly transfer to another his power and, consequently, his rights, as to cease to be a man; nor can there ever be a power so sovereign that it can carry out every possible wish" (p. 214). Spinoza's hermeneutics, whereby the truth of the Bible

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[8] There is a critical translation error in the first sentence of the important chapter XV (p. 190). That sentence should read, „Those who know not that philosophy and *theology* are distinct . . .", not „philosophy and reason", as printed (B. Polka, personal communication).

[9] Spinoza's double critique of Maimonides, pp. 114–118, in chap. VII, and of Alfakhar, pp. 191–192, in chap. XV, frames chaps. VII–XV as the unit concerned most specifically with biblical interpretation (VII) and the relation between philosophy and theology (XV).

is not contradicted by its manifest contradictions and redundancies, thus has as its corollary his philosophical claim that the „true aim of government is liberty" (p. 259): that the democratic state must tolerate contradiction comprehended as dissent (p. 263).

What modern biblical criticism has taken from Spinoza is exclusively the historical-critical method without his equal concern for the „truth" (p. 101) of the biblical text and for the interrelation of biblical hermeneutics and intellectual history or ethics. Most specialists over the past century have concerned themselves primarily with philology, text criticism, history, and the reconstruction of the allegedly earliest and original version of the text. The result, an analytically dissecting method often lacking an accompanying concern for synthesis or textual significance, all but bastardizes the very Spinoza claimed as „father". Despite its real contributions to the understanding of the history of Israelite literature, historical-criticism has intellectually impoverished itself in its separation from the larger tradition of which it was once part.

Many contemporary practitioners of a literary approach therefore disdain the historical-critical method, rejecting it as altogether invalid. They turn to the synchronic method in an attempt to restore meaning to the biblical text. Although Sternberg ostensibly grants the method its legitimacy, he effectively restricts its role to *ancilla,* interpretation's handmaiden asssisting the „inquiry into the historical processes of composition" of the text but barred from crossing the rigid line imposed by Sternberg's poetics „between source and discourse" (p. 22). Despite such strictures, I contend that diachronic analysis is indispensable to the interpretation of the biblical text as it stands and plays an essential role in conceptualizing the nature of Israelite authorship. That double claim I shall now attempt to demonstrate with reference to the biblical flood story.

The story's narrative background, of course, is quite familiar. Creation is followed by fall, by the first murder, by Lamech's song of enthusiastic vengeance, and by the difficult story of the intercourse between divine beings and human women (something seemingly more appropriate in the context of Homeric epic). Thereby discovering to his chagrin that the humanity he has made devotes itself only to evil, God repents – this is one of the most extraordinary lines in the Bible – that he has made humans (Gen. 6:6) and sets out to destroy all life.

> „Yahweh said, 'I will blot out from the earth the men [i.e., the humankind] whom I have created – from *man* to *cattle* to *creeping things* to *birds of the sky;* for I regret that I made them'." (Gen. 6:7).

The divine intent signalled by the Hebrew verb „blot out" (מחה) is to transform the earth into a *tabula rasa,* to wipe the slate clean.[10] The telling sequence of the life-forms listed ominously concretizes the verbal action. In mapping out the sequence of destruction, God carefully cites in chiastic order (A B C : C' B' A') his creative acts of days five and six, the days when life in its basic forms was created. The implication of this chiastic citation is telling: God plans the as yet unspecified form of destruction as a precise and thorough reversal of Creation.

Creation (Gen. 1:20–26)	Reversal of Creation (Gen. 6:7)
A birds of the sky (Day 5)	C' man
B cattle and creeping things (Day 6)	B' cattle, creeping things
C man	A' birds of the sky

There the story would abruptly end – not only leaving the scholar without a Bible to discuss but more seriously leaving the reader embarrassed by a Yahweh who, however omnipotent, patently lacks divine omniscience – but for the omniscient narrator's qualification, „But Noah found favor with Yahweh" (Gen. 6:8). Noah will become the basis for an experiment in divine eugenics: by means of Noah, Yahweh hopes to create a new human stock from an obedient root, the wicked rest of humanity extirpated. God thus commands Noah to build an ark, informing him, in a passage that I shall label „Text One" for ease of reference:

Text One

> (17) „For my part, I am about to bring the Flood – waters upon the earth – to destroy all flesh under the sky in which there is breath of life; everything on earth shall perish. (18) But I will establish My convenant with you, and you shall enter the ark, with your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives. (19) And of all that lives, of all flesh, you shall take *two of each* into the ark to keep alive with you; they shall be *male and female.* (20) From birds of every kind, cattle of every kind, every kind of creeping thing on earth, two of each shall come to

[10] The imagery inherent in the Hebrew verb is specifically that of erasure, in the first instance, textual (Num. 5:23; Exod. 32:32) but also more general wiping (2 Kgs. 21:13). For further discussion of the verb, see U. Cassuto, *A Commentary in the Book of Genesis* (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961–64) 1. 304–305. This motif of God's re-beginning from a *tabula rasa,* an enforced *ex nihilo* in response to human iniquity, is frequent in the Bible. It recurs in the debates between Moses and God following the episodes of the golden calf (Exod. 32:10) and the spies (Num. 14:11–12) and in the conception of the devastation of the autochthonous peoples of Canaan in order to create a new moral community bound by God's law (Lev. 18:24–30; 20:22–26). So characteristic is this motif of God's ominous duality as destroyer and creator that the early midrash retrojects it into the pre-history of Creation, positing a succession of other worlds as having been created and destroyed by God before, finally, he was content with this one: see *Genesis Rabbah* 3:7 in the edition of J. Theodor and Ch. Albeck, *Midrash Bereshit Rabba* (2d printing; 3 vols.; Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1965) 1. 23.

you to stay alive. . . ." (22) Noah did so; just as God commanded him, so he did. (Gen. 6:17–22)

God's command that Noah collect two of every species of animal to be taken onto the ark, so that not only human but also animal life will survive the flood, is followed immediately by the narrator's noting Noah's prompt obedience. The narrator uses a compliance formula: „just as God commanded him, so he did." With Noah's having thus perfectly executed the command to collect the animals, it should cause the close reader some consternation to find Noah once again commanded to collect animals, as if he had not already done so, although this time, in Text Two, according to a different numerical criterion:

Text Two

(1) Then Yahweh said to Noah, „Go into the ark, with all your household, for you alone have I found righteous before Me in this generation. (2) *Of every clean animal you shall take seven pairs, a man and its mate, and of every animal which is not clean, two, a man and its mate;* (3) *of the birds* of the sky also, seven pairs, male and female, to keep seed alive upon all the earth. (4) For in seven days' time I will make it rain upon the earth, forty days and forty nights, and I will blot out from the earth all existence that I created." (5) And Noah did just as Yahweh commanded him. (Gen. 7:1–5).

Although this text follows immediately upon the preceding one, it cannot logically be read as chronologically consequent upon it without immense hermeneutical contortion. The first compliance formula renders the subsequent divine command otiose and the second compliance formula inexplicable. Not only is the second passage redundant in light of the first, it is also inconsistent with it in the system of categorizing and enumerating the creatures to be saved and in its conception of the origin and duration of the waters which are to destroy life.

In Text One, life is to be perserved, „of all flesh . . . two of each" (6:19), without exception. In contrast, in Text Two, animals and birds are categorized as either clean of unclean (7:2; problematically anticipating the dietary laws which are not revealed to Israel until Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14). Of the clean animals, seven pair are to be preserved; of the unclean, but a single pair. Even the terms employed in each case to denote the two genders of a sexual pair are altogether discrepant. In my translation of Gen. 7:2, I have used the awkward „a man and its mate", in order more literally to reflect the force of the original Hebrew: אִישׁ וְאִשְׁתּוֹ (7:2, bis).[11] The

[11] To be sure, the former phrase does occur in Gen. 7:3. The Syriac Peshitta version is troubled by the inconsistent means of referring to the animals' gender and levels the lexical variation, thereby assimilating the lexicon of 7:1–5 to that of 6:17–22.

contrasting formulation, found in Text One, is „male and female" זָכָר וּנְקֵבָה (6:19). I stress this difference because almost all available English translations obscure the inconsistency by employing the single word, „male", in both cases.[12]

There is a further fundamental inconsistency between the two passages in the conception of the nature and origin of the waters which are to destroy life. In Text One, (Gen. 6:17), the water is „the Flood, waters upon the earth": I have capitalized the word because it is technical and distinctive in its force. This Flood does not involve natural water. There is a poetic note shortly afterward that: „All the fountains of the great deep burst apart, / And the floodgates of the sky broke open" (Gen. 7:11). The paired reference to the fountains of the great deep and the floodgates of the sky is a clear allusion to the second act of Creation whereby God separates the primordial Abyss into subterranean and supernal waters. God now is about to pull the stopcock that in each case keeps the primordial waters safely dammed above the vault of the firmament and below the fundament of the earth.[13] Literally pulling the plug on Creation, God will restore the *status quo ante,* the earth once again to become a watery void. This Flood is effectively a mythological reversal of creation,[14] slated to last, it is said elsewhere, a year and ten days (Gen. 7:11a and 8:13–14).[15] By contrast, in Text Two, the waters are described more straightforwardly as rain which will begin in seven days and last for forty (Gen. 7:4).

But for special pleading, the unavoidable conclusion is that there are *two* flood stories, or more precisely, a flood and a downpour story, commingled, just as there are two problematically contiguous sequences of command and execution. The relation between the two accounts cannot be rendered in narrative terms: Noah does not move from the first to the second. Rather there are clearly two mutually exclusive accounts,

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[12] So *The Complete Bible: An American Translation,* trans. J. M. Powis Smith, Edgar J. Goodspeed, *et al.* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939); both the Authorized (King James) Version and the Revised Standard Version (although gently hinting at the lexical distinction by restricting the definite article to Gen. 7:2); *The Jerusalem Bible* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1968); and the *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1988).

[13] For a diagrammatic representation of the cosmology presupposed by Genesis 1, depicting the waters both supernal and subterrestrial, see N. M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Schocken, 1970) 5.

[14] On the flood as a restoration of the pre-creation watery chaos, or Gen. 7:11 as a reversal of Gen. 1:2, see H. Gunkel, *Genesis* (Göttinger Handkommentar zum Alten Testament; 4th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1917) 77, 144; Cassuto, *Genesis,* 2. 97; Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* 55; M. Fishbane, *Text and Texture* (New York: Schocken, 1979) 33–34.

[15] On the complexity of the chronology (which the Septuagint tries to minimize), see J. Skinner, *Genesis* (2nd ed.; International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1930) 167–169; S. E. Loewenstamm, „The Flood", in idem, *Comparative Studies in Biblical and Ancient Oriental Literatures* (Alter Orient und Altes Testament 204; Neukirchen–Vluyn: Butzon & Bercker Kevelaer, 1980) 93–121, especially pp. 110–114.

each of which preserves independent traditions concerning the origins of the water which destroys life (primordial waters versus rain), the duration of the water (one year versus forty days), and the categorization and enumeration of the creaturely life to be saved (two of each species or rather seven pair of the clean, one pair of unclean). Further, as I have already pointed out, it is not only by means of these substantive or topical criteria that the two competing traditions can be distinguished: syntax and language independently point to their discrepancy.

The Breakdown of Synchrony

	Text One	**Text Two**
Number of animals:	„two of each" (one pair)	seven pair of clean one pair of unclean
Watery Devastation:	„Flood" (Primordial Abyss)	rain
Duration:	one year and ten days	forty days
Lexicon:	„male and female"	„a man and its mate"

Herein lies the justification for the diachronic analysis of the Bible according to the standard historical-critical method. The two contiguous passages cannot be construed in terms of a narrative poetics that derives the text from the artistic genius of the *narrator.* The interpreter's methodology must consequently shift from a synchronic poetics to a method informed by diachrony: to an analysis of the text as the work of a *redactor* who has conjoined originally separate literary documents.[16]

Interestingly, what has not been adequately studied, either by conventional historical-critical scholarship or by the newer, synchronic approaches, is the impact upon the mind of ancient Israelite scribes of such mutually exclusive texts as we have seen here, each of which is authoritative. Recent scholarship has paid growing attention to the clear evidence that Israelite authors were not simply passive transmitters of texts but also interpreters of them and that significant elements of the Bible clearly derive from sophisticated exegetical activity on the part of ancient Israelite authors. There is evidence to suggest that the editors of this narrative were indeed troubled by the fearful

[16] Sternberg briefly refers to the flood story in several instances in the context of his analysis of the varieties and significance of repetition. He astutely points out the failure of Cassuto to resolve one of its repetitions (p. 376) and by way of contrast attempts to resolve other of its repetitions in terms of a deliberate narrative structure, the sequence of „forecast" and „enactment". He argues that the latter structure functions to elucidate the character of Noah: the narration of his obedient entry into the ark reveals what was implied in the proleptic description of Noah as „righteous" (p. 388; cf. pp. 418, 439). In light of the analysis here, Sternberg's reference to a single sequence of forecast and enactment overlooks the pleonasm of double command and triple compliance.

asymmetry of the two mutually exclusive accounts concerning the flood – or shall I say the rain?

Immediately following Text Two, the editor announces the devastation's onset:

Text Three

> (6) Noah was six hundred years old when the Flood came, waters upon the earth. (7) Noah, with his sons, his wife, and his sons' wives, went into the ark because of the waters of the Flood. (8) *Of the clean animals, of the animals that are not clean, of the birds,* and of everything that creeps on the ground, (9) *two of each, male and female,* came to Noah into the ark, as God had commanded Noah. (10) And on the seventh day the waters of the Flood came upon the earth. (Gen. 7:6–10).

Noah, having already been credited for complying with each of the two previous inconsistent divine commands regarding the animals, is now for the third time credited for obedience as he presumably watches the animals enter the ark, apparently of their own volition. However the force of this third compliance formula, the note that the animals entered the ark „as God had commanded Noah", is absolutely unclear: the final creaturely cargo of the ark properly complies with neither prior divine command.

In this new formulation the categorization of the animals as clean or unclean, which I have underlined, refers back to Text Two. That formulation is rendered contextually problematic, however, since only two of each, not seven pair of clean and one pair of unclean as originally commanded, are here to be preserved. Even on its own terms, of course, this passage cannot logically be construed. If „two of each" are consistently to be preserved, irrespective of their cultic status, why make the clean/unclean distinction at all? As lacking any clear referential force and thereby rendered contextually meaningless, the clean/unclean distinction is therefore rather a lexical tag by means of which the writer of the verse attempts to preserve the categorization of the creatures found in Text Two while harmonizing it with the numerical scheme of the Text One, which I have italicized, according to which only a single pair of *all* creatures is to be preserved (6:19–20).[17]

To recapture the literary an intellectual dynamics responsible for this text, the attentive reader must adopt *hermeneutics* as a theory of reading. Although ostensibly simply a consecutive narrative, the passage cannot be read on its own terms without its forcefully breaking down the reader's expectation of the text's coherence. Far from deriving from a narrator whose goals are to produce an artistic text, whose accomplish-

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[17] For the verse as redactional, see Gunkel, *Genesis,* 62–63; and S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (12th ed.; London: Methuen, 1926) 90. Although this analysis is rejected by Nielsen, *Oral Tradition,* 98, I do not find his argument cogent.

ments are discerned by means of *poetics,* the verses derive from a redactor confronted by a hermeneutical crisis: clearly contradictory traditions concerning the flood, each of which is equally authoritative while mutually exclusive. The Israelite conception of the authority of the canon required the preservation of each of these traditions: the canon is conservative in its hermeneutics. „Be careful to observe only that which I enjoin upon you: neither add to it nor take away from it" (Deut. 13:1 [12:32 in English versions]).

The editor therefore retains the two texts in sequence. Confronted thereby by their clear inconsistency, he attempts in a third, new text, to provide an exegetical harmonization of their differences which serves only to underscore those differences. He purchases a nominal lexical consistency at the cost of revealing his diachronic editorial hand. In his anxious attempt to preserve each source, he subverts both: the compliance formula actually signals the breach of both previous divine imperatives. Consistent with neither, the now exegetical text is in fact a new literary creation whose origins have no direct ground in either in revelation or in tradition: the text derives from exegesis. The canon is thus radical in its hermeneutics: the very requirement for conservation requires its breach.

This study has focused upon the biblical Flood story in order to demonstrate the kinds of interpretive issues that the diachronic method can illuminate – even in the case of very familiar narratives. However, this instance does not represent an isolated case. The biblical text is rife with such *aporia* which not only mandate interpretation but, more important, establish that Scripture itself is hermeneutical in structure. Key features of the text that a synchronic method's assumption of a single author would overlook or explain in aesthetic terms, actually involve basic issues of authorship and textual authority when interpreted through the lens of a diachronic method.

Such a recognition is particularly important because hermeneutics is conventionally thought to be external to the Bible and secondary to it, both chronologically and ontologically. The history of interpretation, in this light, essentially begins with the post-biblical versions, rabbinic exegesis, or early Christian reflections. Hermeneutics would thereby constitute the human unpacking or recovery of meaning from an authoritative, Scriptural text. That model is altogether dualistic and hierarchial in its structure: human on the one side, God or divine revelation on the other; interpretation on one side, Scripture on the other.

Because I do not believe that model of hermeneutics can be supported by textual evidence, I wish to propose another one, one which takes into account the theoretical implications of the diachronic methodology suggested by this study. Just as I have tried to demonstrate that the narrative of the Flood story has a hermeneutical structure, I want to suggest more broadly that the Hebrew Bible embeds interpretation, that hermeneutics is not secondary to the canon, that there is no bifurcation between revelation and interpretation, nor between divine (Scripture) and human (hermeneutics).

These issues arise most clearly in the context of a biblical law. This important literary genre has tended to be essentially spurned by the Bible as Literature movement, which thereby replays the old Law/Gospel polemic, albeit transforming it into a Law/Narrative one. Despite this situation, I belive that the diachronic study of biblical law raises issues that should be central to any comprehensive biblical hermeneutics. In this context, I can only provide a brief example. One of the aspects that distinguishes biblical law from all of the other Ancient Near Eastern legal collections is the attribution of biblical law to divine revelation. All biblical law is either spoken directly by God or indirectly, through Moses, his prophetic intermediary. In contrast, the speaker and ostensible author of Hammurabi's Code, for example, is King Hammurabi himself (1792–1750 BCE).

The Bible's convention of the attribution of all law to God leads to a series of fascinating hermeneutical issues.[18] The very convention of authoritatively voiced law, combined with notions of canonicity, led to the preservation in ancient Israel of multiple and originally independent legal corpora, much as separate legal collections are to be found in cuneiform literature. Beginning during the Exile, however, confronted with a threat to their national existence, Judaean scribal editors began to collect these originally separate legal collections and combine them together with narratives. The text they eventually created, the Pentateuch, thereby embeds in its narrative three separate collections of laws: the Covenant Code (Exodus 21:1; 23:19), the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26), and the laws of Deuteronomy (chapters 12–26).

The hermeneutical implications of this redactional feat are enormous and, indeed, the very achievement points to political compromise between different social groups in Israel as well as to a sophisticated body of accompanying oral interpretation.[19] On the one hand, because each of these three legal collections originates either from a separate period of Israelite history or from a separate social stratum of ancient Israelite society, they are frequently inconsistent with one another in their content or requirements, if not actually contradicting or even polemically reformulating one another. On the other hand, each of the three mutually inconsistent legal corpora is made simultaneously and equally authoritative: each is attributed to divine revelation.[20]

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[18] For a fuller exposition see B. M. Levinson, „The Human Voice in Divine Revelation: the Problem of Authority in Biblical Law", in *Innovation in Religious Traditions: Essays in the Interpretation of Religious Change* (ed. M. A. Williams, M. S. Jaffee, and C. Cox; Studies in Religion and Society; Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, forthcoming in 1992).

[19] M. Smith, „Pseudepigraphy in the Israelite Literary Tradition", *Pseudepigrapha I: Pseudopythagorica – Lettres de Platon – Littérature pseudépigraphique juive* (ed. K. von Fritz; Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique 18; Geneva: Vandoeuvres, 1971) 191–215 with ensuing discussion, 216–227, esp. 225–227; M. Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985) 260–272.

[20] Cf. the formulation of the hermeneutical issue by Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation*, 163.

The corpus of law thereby ascribed to revelation becomes contradictory, incomprehensible without interpretation.

It is particularly arresting to see that the attempt to resolve the contradictory legislation of the Pentateuch originates not subsequent to the closure of the canon, but within the Bible itself. Such attempts pointedly demonstrate that the *exegesis* of authoritative Scripture within Scripture itself acquired authoritative status as Scripture. Even more striking is that such harmonistic exegesis should assert itself as conforming to the original stipulations involved, should thereby present *exegetical law* as the original signification of the law. For example, the post-exilic Chronicler, in 2 Chron 35:13, asserts as „according to the law" his legal harmonization of the contradictory Passover laws of Exod. 12:9 (which requires that the paschal lamb be roasted *in fire* and forbids its being boiled) and Deut. 16:7 (which requires that the paschal lamb be *boiled*) – although it conforms to neither! The harmonistic if impossible solution reads literally: „They *boiled* the paschal offering *in fire,* according to the law" (2 Chron. 35:13).[21] The parallel with the equally improbable narrative harmonization in the flood story, where the redactor's „just as God had commanded Noah" (Gen. 7:9) signals conformity more exegetically wished for than evident, should be obvious.

This is not the context to multiply such examples but only to suggest their consequences. The diachronic method, whether it is applied to law or to narrative, highlights important issues of authorship and textual structure. Narratives that are intractable if read only in synchronic terms become meaningful when interpreted in diachronic terms. Moreover, the diachronic method has clear hermeneutical implications. It reveals that exegesis constitutes part of the very compositional and redactional dynamic that produces Scripture.[22] The Bible itself is a product of what it engenders; its modern readers respond in kind to, and thereby sustain, the interpretive dialogue that gave it birth. If the paradigm of the newer literary approach is that of a synchronic poetics of narrative, I urge instead the model of a diachronic hermeneutics. It is the *aporia* of the Bible, those contradictions and redundancies made central to interpreta-

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[21] See M. Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) 322; H. L. Ginsberg, *The Israelian Heritage of Judaism* (New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1982) 58; and Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation,* 134–137, with greatest attention to the hermeneutical issues involved.

[22] The legal corpus of Deuteronomy is perhaps the most striking example of a corpus of Scripture that is exegetical in its origins – and whose longstanding textual difficulties only begin to come clear by means of a hermeneutical method. I elaborate this position in my dissertation: B. M. Levinson, *The Hermeneutics of Innovation: The Impact of Centralization upon the Structure, Sequence, and Reformulation of Legal Material in Deuteronomy* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1991).

tion by Spinoza, that alone allow the recovery of the literary and religious life of ancient Israel and provide the basis for an adequate biblical hermeneutics.[23]

[23] A previous version of this essay was presented to the conference, „Reading Scripture: Literary Criticism and Biblical Hermeneutics", Pannonhalma, Hungary, July 4–6, 1991. The essay revises and elaborates sections of B. M. Levinson, „'The Right Chorale': From the Poetics of Biblical Narrative to the Hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible", in *„Not in Heaven": Coherence and Complexity in Biblical Narrative* (ed. J. P. Rosenblatt and J. C. Sitterson; Indiana Studies in Biblical Literature; Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991) 129–153, 242–247.

ISSUES

STEPHEN PRICKETT

The Changing of the Host: Translation and Linguistic History

For Europe the Bible has always been a translated book. More than that: it is a book whose translated status has always been a conspicuous part of its social, literary, and even religious identity. Almost every line of the text reminds us that it is about the people of another time and place who belonged to other kinds of societies from our own and who spoke different languages from ourselves. We have grown so accustomed to this curious fact that it is worth pausing for a moment to call attention to the obvious. If we compare the Bible with, say, the Koran as Holy Books, we find at once that there is one very striking difference. Whatever its degree of borrowing from the Bible and other earlier writings, the Koran is mediated to the Islamic world in the same Arabic in which it was written by the prophet Mohammed. A Mohammedan, whether in Glasgow, Ankara, Khartoum, or Jakarta, is obliged to pray in the original and therefore sacred language dictated to the founder of his faith, it is said, by the Archangel Gabriel for that purpose – and for that reason there must be no tampering with the word of God. Three quarters of the Christian Bible, by contrast, is acknowledged even by its most fundamentalist adherents to be originally the scriptures of another religion. Moreover, it was never a linguistically homogenous whole.

Though what we now call the Old Testament was mostly written in Hebrew, substantial parts of it are translations or paraphrases from yet other earlier holy books – Cananite, Mesopotamian or Egyptian, for instance. Indeed, since it seems to have originated as a critical and often hostile commentary on those earlier religious writings, there is a very real sense in which the Bible can be said to owe its very origins to intertextuality. By the time the New Testament came to be written, however, the vernacular language of the Jews was Aramaic, so that even in the Synagogues the Hebrew scriptures had to be read either by means of paraphrases into that language, called *Targums,* or, in Greek-speaking areas, by the Greek translation called the *Septuagint.* If we assume that Jesus and his immediate circle were themselves Aramaic-speakers, we have to note also the astonishing fact that the written accounts of his life and sayings are themselves, even in their earliest known forms, translations – since the remaining section of our Bible was written in a different language altogether, *koiné* Greek, a non-literary low-status form of the language spoken mostly by traders and non-Greeks thoughout Asia Minor in the early years of the Christian era. This was a sign of the times, for within only a generation or so the early Christians had lost almost all contact with both Hebrew and Aramaic and were using either the *Septuagint* or the Old Latin and then the *Vulgate* versions. Thus what was in effect the first truly unified monoglot version of the Bible, was already itself not merely a translation, but a translation of a translation. Nor was this the end of the long proces

of textual accommodation. The English King James Authorized Version was, in turn, a political as well as a religious undertaking in which the Protestant appropriation and alteration of the Catholic *Vulgate* paralleled the earlier Christian appropiation and alteration of the Jewish scriptures.

This openly translated quality is more than just part of the 'givenness' of the Bible, it seems to flaunt itself as somehow central and intrinsic to our whole experience of it. As has already been suggested, it is possible that the origins of the Hebrew scriptures themselves lie not so much in a particular revelation as in a critical commentary on yet earlier texts or even unwritten traditions of neighbouring societies. A text that implies within itself the existence of other, prior, texts already also implicitly suggests multi-layered ways of reading. Moreover, it may also help to account for a curious contradiction in our attitude to the Bible that has had a profound effect on the development of many modern European languages – not least upon English. Though historically we may have had no difficulty in accepting the Bible's general relevance to our immediate situation – that it is, for example, about the Fall of Man or the Human Condition or the Forgiveness of Sins – we are also simultaneously aware that in some very profound sense it is *not about us.* It is an indication of the paradox we are engaged with that such a statement immediately sounds as if it is flying in the face of two millenia of often highly rhetorical and emotional polemic to the contrary. Nevertheless, in spite of jokes in the English-speaking world to the effect that God is clearly an Englishman, or that we prefer the *Saint* James' original version of the Bible to modern translations, we all of us know at the same time how essentially *alien* to us are the worlds of both the Old and New Testaments. The immense weight of traditional moralistic and devotional rhetoric urging us to see it as pointing to ourselves merely serves to illustrate the almost intractable scale of the original problem. To lose sight of this is to lose sight of what is happening in all those mediaeval stained-glass windows and illuminated manuscripts where the Patriarchs or Apostles are performing their typological roles in contemporary dress and setting; it is to lose sight of the corresponding deployment of biblical metaphor and typology not merely in religious and moral polemics but in the parallel contemporary discourses of politics, of trade, medicine, and everyday life. At Ranworth church, in north Norfolk, a fourteenth-century manuscript shows Jonah, dressed much as a local pason, being swallowed by a great fish from the nearby Broad. A panel of thirteenth-century stained glass in Canterbury Cathedral shows Jesus raising Jairus's daughter in a curiously perspectived mediaeval merchant's house. To James I of England,thundering against the filthy habit of smoking, it seemed entirely natural to compare the perverted lusts of smokers to the Children of Israel 'lusting in the wilderness after quails'. To Oliver Cromwell, fighting against Catholics in Ireland, it seemed no less appropriate to justify the brutal obliteration of Catholic society and, if necessary, the massacre of his opponents, by supporting the Protestant Plantation in Ulster with images of the Israelites occupying Canaan in the Book of Joshua.

Much critical ink has been split over the exact nature of mediaeval iconography, and only slightly less on the conventions of seventeenth-century political rhetoric, and it is not my purpose here to enter such specialist historical controversies. My point is rather to draw attention to the basic hermeneutical problem that underlies all such debates. Though the contemporary relevance of the Bible, its events, imagery and customs, was mediated as being self-evident and indeed as a quasi article of faith to our ancestors, influencing every level in their thinking from the broadest question of political policy and philosophical speculation, down to the minutest detail of their everyday lives, this sense of immediate relevance was achieved not in cooperation with the actual biblical texts with which they were confronted but rather *in the teeth* of their literal meaning, which, with stubborn consistency, proclaimed not merely their remoteness, but frequently as well their arcane and essentially unrepeatable nature. Indeed, the more we focus on this phenomenon, so familiar to any political, literary, or social historian that it normally passes witout a second glance, the odder we discover it to be.

Not the least odd is the fact that so many of the biblical translators themselves seem to be unaware of it. Take for instance this quotation from one of our leading experts on the subject, Eugene A. Nida.

> Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style ...by 'natural' we mean that the equivalent forms should not be 'foreign' either in form... or meaning. That is to say, a good translation should not reveal its non-native source.[1]

Though I have used it before, the quotation is an important one in that it seems to encapsulate what might be described as a modern common-sense approach to biblical translation. Certainly it has been an influential one. Nida was a leading figure in the American Bible Society during the 1960s and 70s, and the person who, more than any other, was responsible for the theoretical underpinning of the Anglo-American *Good News Bible* – probably the most successful modern translation on the market.

Translation, for Nida, is basically a matter of 'finding the closest equivalence, in the host language for the message contained by the original source language. In developing this theme in a later book significantly entitled *Towards a Science of Translating,* he distinguishes between two basic kinds of equivalence, which he terms the 'formal' and the 'dynamic'. In his words, formal equivalence focuses attention on the message itself, in both form and content. In such translation one is concerned with such

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[1] Eugene A. Nida, 'Principles of Translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating', *On Translating* ed. Reuben A. Brower, Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature No.23, Cambridge, Mass. Harvard University Press, 1959, p. 19.

correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to concept.[2] The purpose of following such structural forms of the original is to reveal as much of the source language as possible. Dynamic equivalence, on the other hand, does not concern itself with forms, but aims to create in the host language an *equivalent effect* to that given in the source language. A classic example in biblical translation is that of the parable of the publican and the Pharisee in Luke Chapter 18 [9–14]. Now there is apparently a particular tribe in the Congo where beating one's breast is a sign of pride and agression; the corresponding outward sign of humility and repentence is to beat one's head with a club. In such a context, argues Nida, it is no good for the repentant sinner to beat his breast: it is head-clubbing or nothing. Similarly, there is in New Guinea, I am told, an isolated mountain tribe to whom sheep are quite unknown, but pigs are a much cherished domestic pet. By extension, for such a people, Christ has to become the Pig of God. Coming from a background of missionary translation Nida is understandably committed to the principle of dynamic equivalence, involving, in his words, the 'interpretation of a passage in terms of relevance to the present-day world, not to the Biblical culture'. Where there is conflict between meaning and style, 'the meaning must have priority over the stylistic forms'.[3] The task of the translator, he writes, is essentially one of 'exegesis', not of 'hermeneutics'.[4]

Now it is understandable why someone coming from Nida's professional concerns should be more interested in exegesis than hermeneutics, but such a translation philosophy, attractive as it may appear in its simple over-riding priorities, is, of course, (as I have argued elsewhere)[5] profoundly simplistic in its assumption of the uncomplicated nature of the 'message' to be conveyed, and, as we have already seen, no less naïve in its approach to linguistic history. So far from biblical translation being best achieved by finding appropriate 'equivalencies', it has historically had its greatest impact on the host language in precisely those cases where there was already *no* existing appropriate equivalent available. Moreover this same process was already at work in the very biblical languages that Nida is apparently prepared to take as given. Thus the first major example of biblical translation, made around the third century B. C., was the Greek *Septuagint.* It was to reveal its 'non-native source' in a way that was to have a profound effect on the subsequent development of the Greek language – and ultimately therefore on the *koiné* Greek of the New Testament itself. The Hebrew word *kabod*

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[2] Eugene A. Nida, *Towards a Science of Translating,* Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1964. See also Nida and C. Tabor, *The Theory and Practice of Translation,* Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1969.

[3] Ibid. p. 19.

[4] *On Translation,* p. 15

[5] See Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation,* Cambridge University Press, 1986, p. 31.

comes from a root that had originally meant 'weight' but at some point after the time of Ezekiel it had acquired a meaning closer to our word 'glory' – including the visual aspects of light. It was translated in the *Septuagint* by the Greek word *doxa* which had originally meant something like 'appearance' or even 'reputation', but now rapidly appropriated these *visual* connotations to mean 'radiance' or 'splendour' – even in other contemporary pagan texts apparently unconnected with religious discourse. The cultural and linguistic distance between Hebrew and Greek, however great it may be to the historian, is of course as nothing to the temporal and cultural gulf that separates Hebrew from English. Yet the degree to which the latter has been modified by the former is out of all proportion greater. There is a story (possibly apocryphal) that when the translators of the *New English Bible* came to the parable of the Prodigal Son they decided to find out the modern English equivalent of the 'fatted calf'. Accordingly they consulted a butcher at Smithfield Market in London as to what one called a calf that had been specially fattened up for a particular occasion. He explained that the technical phrase was 'fatted calf' – and that it came from the Bible! Similarly, astonishingly little critical attention has been paid to the way in which Western Europe, with its cool temperate climate and abundant rainfall, was able to assimilate and successfully make use of the everyday imagery of a semi-nomadic near-eastern desert people as part of its own cultural and poetic heritage. Finally, let me return to what may at first sight seem perhaps a rather trivial example. As we have already mentioned, in his *Counterblast to Tobacco* (1604) King James Ist of England, (James VI to us Scots) very properly thunders against the self-indulgence of smokers 'lusting after' the weed 'as the Children of Israel did in the wilderness after quails...' Though the individual instance may be slightly mystifying, the rhetoric of this kind of charge is so familiar to us that we rarely stop to puzzle out the question of why the outraged King James, when he wished to invoke examples of ill-fated lust, should have resorted to the Bible and to this trope of the quails in Exodus Ch. 16 in particular?

The oddity of this reference is underlined by the fact that though the feeding of the Children of Israel in the desert is itself presented quite clearly as a one-off and not-be-repeated miracle, the provision of manna was at least in the form of a consistent daily supply over forty years sojourn in the wilderness, while the flight of quails was a once-only event, apparently to support God's proclamation to Moses in verse 12 that 'at even ye shall eat flesh'. A typical seventeenth-century commentary makes the standard typological connection with the manna:

> This Figure doth most lively represent to us the Holy Eucharist, as Jesus Christ himself witnesseth in the Gospel; and we may boldly say That how wonderful soever this Food of the Jews was, yet had not they in this, nor in any other miraculous Favours bestow'd upon them, any Advantage beyond the Christians, who do truly feed on the

> Heavenly Manna, the Bread of Angels, which Jesus Christ gives to those who are come forth out of Egypt, that is, from the Corruptions and Defilements of the World, and wherewith he comforts and supports them in the Wilderness of this Life, until they enter into the true Land of Promise, as the Jews were maintained with Manna till their entering into Canaan.

The condemnatiry note in James' diatribe comes, of course, from the fact that those who tried to horde the manna found that it went bad on them, and this provides the excuse for a rather nasty little anti-Jewish homily:

> Wherefore also Christians ought to take great Care to acknowledge and improve this divine Grace and Favour better than the Jews did, and to tremble at the Thought of falling into a distaste and dislike of this Heavenly Food, after their Example; who though at the first View of this Miraculous Bread, they were struck with Wonder, yet, being once accustomed to it, they preferred the Garlick and Onions of Egypt before it.[6]

No seventeenth-century commentary that I have yet discovered makes a special typological case for the quails on their own, and it is not, in any case, part of my theme to speculate too closely on what exactly was in James's mind in referring to them. My point is rather a threefold one: first, that such reference was second-nature both to the King and to his intended audience, for whom it was much more than just an illustration; it was, however inappropriate and baffling we may find it, a typological fixing, locating an excessive love of tobacco within the entire divine scheme of the fall and redemption of humanity. The Bible was a part the standard referential language of King and people alike, and even the most trivial incident within its pages could thus legitimately be given an immediate contemporary significance.

My second point, of course, is diametrically opposed to this. Nothing could in fact be further removed from the experience of early Seventeenth century London than the story of the wanderings of the Children of Israel in the desert, and the miraculous processes by which we are told they were sustained for forty years. Everything about the narrative of Exodus 16 serves to stress its extraordinary nature and its place as part of the story of an alien and far-off people – even down to the explanation of such weights and measures as omers and ephahs in verse 36. My third point arises directly from the inherent tension between these two and concerns the way in which by the seventeenth century it is a matter of historical record that the English language found itself shaped and even dominated by the terms and figures of a book inherited from another time,

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[6] *The History of the Old and New Testaments Extracted from the Sacred Scriptures, the Holy Fathers, and Other Ecclesiastical Writers...* Fourth Impression, London 1712. p. 50.

culture, and place – and mediated by means of not one translation, but several. In other words it concerns the very processes of linguistic change which Nida, and his fellow modern biblical translators, have neither understood in their own language nor sought to develop in other languages.

Our modern interest in linguistic change, like our idea of history in general, is essentially a Romantic and post-Romantic phenomenon, dating from no earlier than the second half of the eighteenth century. Though such acute observers as Coleridge were prepared to find in what he called the process of 'desynonymy' evidence for some kind of 'imanent will' or even Hegelian *geist* operating through the historical process of human consciousness,[7] later models tended to seek some more respectable scientific shape even when their motivation was no less overtly theological. Here, for instance, is J. B. Lightfoot, Hulsean and then later Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Cambridge, before becoming Bishop of Durham. Lightfoot was, as it were, the Nida of his day: one of the prime movers in the creation of the *Revised Version* of the Bible of 1885, who had led the way with revisions of the New Testament during the 1870s. Like most biblical translators he also wrote about his theory of translation; where he broke new ground was in his modest willingness also to offer a coherent theory for the eventual success and acceptance of his translation. Both Jerome's *Vulgate* and the *Authorized Version,* he points out, were originally received with the same 'coldness' that now attends his *Revised Version;* both in time gained acceptance by a process which he does not hesitate to ascribe to a moral version of Darwinian Evolution.

> But the parallel may be carried a step farther. In both these cases alike, as we have seen, God's law of progressive improvement, which in animal and vegetable life has been called the principle of natural selection, was vindicated here, so that the inferior gradually disappeared before the superior in the same kind; but in both cases also the remnants of an earlier Bible held and still hold their ground, as a testimony to the past. As in parts of the Latin Service-books the Vulgate has not even yet displaced the Old Latin, which is still retained either in its pristine or in its partially amended form, so also in our own Book of Common Prayer an older version still maintains its place in the Psalter and in the occasional sentences, as if to keep before our eyes the progressive history of our English Bible.[8]

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[7] See Prickett, op. cit. pp. 133–45.

[8] J. B. Lightfoot, *On a fresh Revision of the English New Testament,* Second Edn., Revised, New York, Harper and Rowe, 1873. I am indebted here, and in the following illustration, to Professor Ward Allen, who first drew my attention to this passage.

Since the Revised Version is in scholarly terms an 'improvement' on the Authorized one, it will eventually triumph by a process of moralized natural selection, where even the vestigial remains of the earlier versions in the prayerbook are given an improving significance.

Such theological faith in progress was not, however, allowed to pass unchallenged, even in late Victorian England. The Rev.E.W. Buelinger was no less for midable a scholar than Lightfoot. His *Critical Lexicon* and *Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* was the result of nine years' research, and had established him as one of the foremost Greek scholars of his day. In 1898 he published a work called *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* which, in spite of the slightly dilettante suggestions of its title, was a no less solid piece of scholarship – running as it did over 900 pages. In a section 'Changes of Usage of Words in the English Language' he notes gloomily 'It is most instructive to observe the evidence afforded by many of these changes as to the constant effect of fallen human nature; which, in its use of words, is constantly lowering and degrading their meaning.'[9]

Nor should we assume that this kind of debate between progressivists and deteriorationists belongs primarily to the nineteenth century. Peter Levi, for instance, in his 1974 book, *The English Bible,* agrees with the deteriorationists about the actual quality of the new translations but clings if not to a progressivist view, at least to a meliorist one, about the total cultural scene: 'it appears that the proper virtues of the language not altered so much even now, but have simply been disregarded, as happened often in the past, and will reassert themselves as they did then.'[10] On the other hand Kenneth Grayston, one of the leaders of the panel responsible for the *New English Bible* of 1970, writes with undisguised distste for the degenerate state of the contemporary English language he was forced to use in contrast with the 'richer denser' language available to Spencer, Sydney, Hooker, Marlowe and Shakespeare – not to mention the translators of the *Authorized Version.*[11]

Both these diametrically conflicting models, we note, behind their powerful scholarly and historical apparatus, are not just essentially theological in thrust, but specifically predestinarian – overtly in the nineteenth century examples, more covertly in the case of the twentieth century. The progress or deterioration of the English language, and indeed of human consciousness in general, is not so much a responsibility of individuals, nor even of the race, but of the iron laws of (according to taste) a progressively-orientated or a hopelessly fallen universe. Neither view seems to allow for

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[9] E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible,* London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898 Reprinted Baker House Co, 1968. 15th printing March 1990. p. 856.

[10] Peter Levi, *The English Bible* 1534 – 1859. London: Constable 1974.

[11] Confessions of a Biblical Translator', *New Universities Quarterly,* vol 33, no.3, Summer 1979, p. 187.

any great degree of human spontaneity and creativity, or that the English language, so far from being a monolithic linguistic code, might be a chaotic palimpsest of many cultural codes and dialects. Certainly neither of these neo-Calvinisms allows for the success of deliberate and planned human intervention. Yet in the case of the Authorized Version – held up on all sides as the paradigm of a great translation – that is precisely what the historical evidence suggests. Let me try and sketch in something of the backround.

Even before the Reformation biblical translation was recognised to be a serious matter. An anonymous pre-Wyclif translator noted that in so doing he was risking his life.[12] He was probably right. In 1408 the Convocation at Oxford passed a Constitution forbidding anyone, on pain of excommunication, to translate any part of the scriptures unless authorized by a bishop. Not merely was no authorization subsequently given, but the Lollards were suppressed and to make the message even clearer, Wyclif's body at Lutterworth was dug up and thrown into the river. So clear indeed was that message for would-be translators that for more than a century, in spite of the invention of printing in the meantime, no further attempt at translation was made. Nor was the fate of Tyndale, who finished his translation of the New Testament in 1525, any more encouraging. He was kidnapped from Antwerp on orders from the Emperor, strangled, and burned at the stake.

An important feature of English translation from Tyndale onwards is the constant and cumulative use of earlier translated material where appropriate. The *Authorized Version* is, in fact, nothing less than a palimpsest of the best of previous translations, corrected and winnowed through almost a hundred years of development. Thus Coverdale's complete English Bible printed at Cologne in 1535 is based not so much on his use of Hebrew or Greek (of which he knew little) but on Tyndale, where extant, plus Latin and German sources. Partly because Coverdale was himself a fine prose stylist, the result was remarkably successful – and though it was not licenced by the newly Protestant Henry VIII, Anne Boleyn had a copy in her chamber.

In 1537, Tyndale's disciple John Rogers, in order to preserve the still unpublished sections of the Old Testament translated by his master, produced at Antwerp under the name of Thomas Matthew another Bible which incorporated all of Tyndale's work, and made up what was lacking from Coverdale. This, in turn, was revised by Coverdale and became the basis of the new official, or, because of its size, so-called 'Great Bible', which Thomas Cromwell in 1537 ordered to be installed in every church for the reading of laymen. With the accession of Mary, however, a large number of the copies of this Bible were burned. Many leading Protestants went into exile, and

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[12] J. F. Mozley, The English Bible before the Authorized Version', *The Bible Today*, Eyre and Spottiswode, 1955. p. 127.

it was one such, William Wittingham, who began in Geneva what was to be the first truly popular English translation. Among his companions in Geneva was John Knox, and to assist him in the translation was a team that included John Bodley and his son Thomas (later to be the founder of the library at Oxford). Calvin himself wrote the introduction. Though its notes were held to be objectionable and, indeed, more to the point, politically unacceptable, because of its pocket size and use of roman type it rapidly became the standard for English Bibles – far outselling the officially sanctioned Bishop's Bible.

The accession of James 1 to the combined throne of England and Scotland in 1603 was the signal for renewed pressure for puritan reforms in the liturgy and discipline of the Church of England. At a conference of divines convened by the king at Hampton Court later in that year the Bishop of London, Richard Bancroft, was at first against any new translation:'...if every man's humour might be followed, there would be no end of translating...' James, however, was in favour: 'I profess I could never yet see a Bible well translated in English; but I think that of all, that of Geneva is the worst. I wish some special pains were taken for an uniform translation; which should be done by the best learned in both universities, then reviewed by the bishops, presented to the privy council, lastly ratified by royal authority to be read in the whole church and no other'. 'But it is fit that no marginal notes be added thereunto', rejoined Bancroft. The king could not but agree: 'That caveat is well put in; for in the Genevan translation some notes are partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring of traitorous conceits...'

The ground rules for the new translation laid down as a result of this debate indicate very clearly what was to be expected of the projected *Authorized Version*. It was from the start deliberately conceived of not only as a document of political and theological compromise, but as a text that would refer to and incorporate previous texts. Among the instructions given to the translators were:

I. The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the Bishop's Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit.

II. The names of the prophets and the holy writers, with other names in the text, to be retained as near as may be, accordingly as they are vulgarly used.

III. The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz. as the word church not to be translated congregation &c.

IV. When any word hath divers significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most eminent fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place and the analogy of faith.

V. The division of chapters to be altered either not at all, or as little as may be, if necessity so require.

VI. No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew and Greek words which cannot without some circumlocution so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text...

... XIV. These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishop's Bible, viz. Tindal's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch, Geneva.[13]

Not merely was it intended that, where it was useful or politically expedient, it should be heavily reliant on the collective endeavours of earlier translations, this element of collectivity and consensus was heavily reinforced by an elaborate committee structure which ensured that each of the 47 appointed translators had his individual work reviewed by the others in his group, and the work of each group was then reviewed by all the other groups. Finally, two members from each of the three centres of translation, Cambridge, Oxford, and Westminster, were chosen to review the entire Bible and to prepare the work for publication in London. There was to be no authorization of individual idiosyncrasy in this version. It is frequently said that committees encourage mediocrity and are inimical to the production of great art or literature, but if a camel is a horse designed by a committee, then the *Authorized Verson* is the ultimate camel.

This explicit commitment both to tradition and consensus left its mark on the text in two very important ways. Firstly, it meant that the language of the translation was deliberately archaic. In a period when the English language was changing more rapidly than ever before or since, the Bible was set in words that were designed to stress the essential continuity of the Anglican settlement with the past by recalling the phraseology not merely of the familiar Geneva Bible, but of Coverdale and Tyndale – and beyond that even of the Vulgate itself. At a time of threatened disorder – that within a generation was to culminate in Civil War – the new Bible was a statement of stability, order, and above all continuity with the past. It was in the fullest sense of the word, a political document.

Secondly, there was no room for individual interpretation. Tyndale had drawn the wrath of Church and Government alike by translating the Latin *Ecclesia* as 'congragation' rather than 'Church'. In the volatile atmosphere of the day that was little short of a revolutionary act. Not merely were such interpretations politically inexpedient moreover, they were also theologically inappropriate and even, in extreme cases, blasphemous. If the Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit and the source of its own authority, then it was doubly dangerous of man to seek to amend it in any way. Indeed Nicholas von Wyle, a fifteenth century German translator, had gone so far as to declare

[13] Cited by Norman Sykes, 'The Authorized Version of 1611', Ibid. pp. 141–3.

that in the case of the Bible even copyist's errors should be faithfully transcribed.[14] The King James translators had the added sanction of the Catholic translators of the Rheims and Douai Bibles – the Old Testament, by the latter group, had only just finally appeared after a 27 year delay in 1609 – who had attacked their Protestant rivals for softening the hard places whereas they themselves, they claimed, 'religiously keep them word for word, and point for point, for fear of missing or restraining the sense of the holy Ghost to our phantasie...' Thus John Boyes, a fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, who was both a translator of a section of the New Testament for the Authorized Version, and a member of the final revision panel, recorded in his notes that he and his committee had been careful to preserve ambiguities in the original text. Referring to the word 'praise' in 1 Peter 1. v. 7, which might refer either to Jesus or the members of the church, he commented that 'We have not thought that the indefinite ought to be defined'.[15] Seventeenth century translators, whether Protestant or Catholic, were under no doubt that whatever the difficulties or peculiarities of the Hebrew or Greek they were there for a divinely ordained purpose, and were not to be lightly corrected by human agency.

Yet this manifest unwillingness to limit the meaning of the inspired words of scripture by translation did not hamper the translators linguistically as much as a modern reader might expect. Their deliberate choice of matching ambiguity with ambiguity was aided by both the range of meanings available to seventeenth century English and – just as important – the translators' own personal sensitivities to that range. For example, in Tyndale's translation, John VIII. 46 is rendered as 'Which of you can rebuke me of sin?' Instead of following this perfectly intelligible reading the *Authorized Version* has chosen the much more obscure: 'Which of you convinceth me of sin?' The Greek word in question is *elengcho* which is translated at different points in the *Authorized Version* by no less than six English words: 'convince', 'convict', 'tell one's fault', 'reprove', 'discover' and (as Tyndale had it here) 'rebuke'. Why then the need to depart from Tyndale's reading at this point? The answer seems to lie with the history of that word 'convince'. Though the OED allows only one current meaning of the word, it also lists seven other obsolete senses – all of which were current in the early seventeenth century. Lady Macbeth, for instance, says of Duncan's chamberlains

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[14] George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, Oxford University Press, 1976, p. 262.

[15] Ward Allen (ed.), Translating for King James, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1970, p. 89.

> Will I with wine and wassail so convince
> That memory, the warder of the brain,
> Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
> A limbeck only.
>
> [I.VII.64–7]

Most Shakespeare glossaries suggest that 'convince' here means 'overpower', but other meanings of the word, such as 'to prove a person guilty...especially by judicial procedure'; or 'to disprove, refute'; or 'to demonstrate or prove absurdity' all suggest how Lady Macbeth's mind is racing ahead to visualize how the grooms might be overpowered, their protestations swept aside and refuted as absurd, and finally convicted. Similarly in the *Authorized Version's* careful substitution of 'convince' for 'rebuke' we can catch a hint that Jesus is seen to be challenging the whole network of semi-judicial accusations flung against him as absurd – without, of course, allowing the reader to lose sight of the fact that one day soon these will indeed overpower him and bring him to the ultimate absurdity of the Cross.[16] More importantly for our purposes, however, it renders much less credible arguments that would attribute such subtlety of interpretation simply to the state of seventeenth century English. If that were the case, then Tyndale's 'rebuke me of sin' would have sufficed. What we are looking at here is, I suggest, clear evidence of informed and educated personal choice.

Something of the care with which these particular words were chosen is indicated by a later passage in John 16, v.8: 'And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and and of judgement'. Though the selected translation of *elengcho* here is 'reprove' (again replacing 'rebuke' in Tyndale) the translators have also added 'convince' in the margin. Whether or not this indicates some shade of disagreement among them, it serves to emphasize not merely how closely the words 'reprove' and 'convince' were associated in their minds but also again the degree of personal selection that was brought to that search for finer shades of meaning. It is such sensitivities both to the nuances of individual words and to their relationship to the larger rhythms of the Bible that makes the Authorized Version so remarkable a translation.

We are not, however, dealing with matters of scholarship, but with theories of translation – and, in particular, with the effects of such theories on the development (or otherwise) of the English language. I have no doubt that the modern translators – Lightfoot, Nida, Grayston, for instance – knew much more about the original languages than the translators of the *Authorized Version.* What concerns us, rather, is the outworking of their principles in the personal choice of words. There is a beautiful

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[16] Again I am indebted to a suggestion of Ward Allen for this example.

if strange line in Ezekiel 27 (v.25) which the *Authorized Version* gives as 'the ships of Tarshish did sing of thee in thy market'. Though the idea of a fleet of cargo ships singing praise to its owner or nation simply by the wealth and splendour of its merchandise is a conceit that would not have seemed too far-fetched to the contemporaries of John Donne, modern translators have all insisted on explanatory paraphrase. Thus Lightfoot's *Revised Version* has 'The ships of Tarshish were caravans for thy merchandise'. For the *Good News Bible,* guided by Nida, this becomes still more plainly and prosaically 'Your merchandise was carried in fleets of the largest cargo ships'. Other probable corruptions which the more cautious translators of the *Revised Version* had left intact are clarified with similar éclat by the *Good News Bible.* For instance, Psalm 11. v. 6., in the *Authorized Version* reads 'upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone and an horrible tempest'. 'Snares' (or 'traps') is again an unlikely (though not impossible) reading and in fact only the most minute alteration of the Hebrew pointing is require l to change 'snares' to the more probable 'coals'. The *Good News Bible* reads 'He send down flaming coals and burning sulphur on the wicked; he punishes them with scorching winds' and adding a footnote to explain how it has amended the Hebrew 'traps'. This is unexceptionable textually, but it in addition to altering 'traps' to 'coals', however, it has introduced its own (quite unauthenticated) 'Hebrew parallelism': setting the 'scorching winds' over against the 'flaming coals and burning sulphur' rather than being the third term in the triad. The effect is to suggest not one kind of cataclysmic event (a reference presumably to the fate of the 'cities of the plain', Sodom and Gomorrah, Genesis 20) but two quite separate ones: if not fire and brimstone (on their cities?), then scorching winds (on their crops?). It is difficult to know if this is an example of substituting an equivalent cultural effect – atomic holocausts, perhaps, and dustbowls in the Midwest – or merely the kind of lack of attention to exact wording that we have already noted as characteristic of modern translation theory.

'In translating', wrote Goethe, we must go to the brink of the Untranslatable; it is only then that we really become aware of the foreignness of the nation and the language'. When we read the Bible, we do not take on a patchwork of piecemeal concepts to be matched with supposed equivalencies, we enter into a changing yet self-subsistant world that we can only learn to understand from inside. The language of the Bible forms a curiously and uniquely self-referential whole[17] – and it is important to realize that this is not in spite of its palimpsestic and translated origins, but rather *because* of them. The reason why, for instance, the language of the *Authorized Version* (in spite of its many scholarly errors) is more subtle, more suggestive, more resonant,

[17] For a further discussion of the self-referential qualities of the Bible see Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God,* Yale University Press, 1988.

and in the end (I think history will show) more successful, has little to do with the supposed 'superior' state of Jacobean English, and much to do with respective translation theories and, not least, with the consequent choices of the individual translators. The seventeenth century translators believed, rightly or wrongly, that they were dealing with a seamless web of divine guidance from the first sentence of Genesis to the last page of Revelation. As we have seen, they also inhabited a world where the events of the Bible were read as both alien and immediately close. Their language was not a monolithic and opaque entity to which the unfamiliar had to be painstakingly accommodated but an essentially translucent medium *through* which other older or alternative layers and meanings could clearly be discerned. As one might expect with hindsight, this meant that though they were much less prepared to take liberties with the original texts, they were much more prepared to make such innovations as seemed to them appropriate in the English language itself. The *Authorized Version* was not the product of Calvinistic pre-destination, nor yet its modern equivalent of blind historical or linguistic engineering. As we have seen there are many contingent reasons, but no intrinsic historical necessity why it should have been a success other than the fact that it was executed by men of outstanding talent. We have every reason to give credit where credit is due and be grateful to them.

BRAYTON POLKA

Of Scripture, Paradox, and Interpretation

„What is written in the law? How do you read?"[1]

When, according to Luke, chapter 10, a lawyer stands up to put Jesus to the test, he asks: „Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus answers with two questions: „What is written in the law? How do you read?" The lawyer responds, citing Deuteronomy and Leviticus: „You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and your neighbor as yourself." „You have answered right," Jesus tells the lawyer: „do this, and you will live." But the lawyer, not yet justified, Luke writes, asks further: „And who is my neighbor?" Jesus answers with the parable of the Good Samaritan who, unlike the priest and the Levite, shows mercy on the man who had fallen among thieves when going down from Jerusalem to Jericho: „Go and do likewise," Jesus tells the lawyer.

What is written in the law? How do you read? In response to the lawyer's singular question about what he should do to inherit eternal life, Jesus answers him with two singular questions. He directs the attention of his interlocutor to law, to Torah, to Scripture as involving not only what is written but also how he reads. The „doing„ or action which is involved in inheriting eternal life is written in the law, but the written law involves the further question: how do you read? The Greek word, which is translated as „read", is rooted in the verb for „know". In other words, Jesus asks the lawyer: how do you know, how do you read or do – enact or live – what is written in the law? The lawyer responds to the two questions of Jesus by citing two of the greatest legal text in the Hebrew tradition: Deuteronomy 6.5 (from the Shema, itself commenting on the convenant made by God with the Israelites and the giving of the Ten Commandments, in Deuteronomy 5) and Leviticus 19.18 (which is part of the suite of legal ordinances which God delivers through Moses to the Israelite people). Commanding the love of God and the love of neighbor, these two texts are among the most glorious of scriptural passages about what is written and how one reads what is written in the law. We may recall the parallel passage in Matthew. In response to the lawyer who is said there to test Jesus by asking: „Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus responds: „You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second

[1] Luke, 10. 26. In this study I make use of the Authorized Version, the Revised Standard Version, and the New Revised Standard Version (in light of the Greek text for the New Testament). For texts cited see References. For authors cited, only representative texts are indicated.

is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets." (22.35–40.)

After the lawyer, in Luke's version, indicates how one is to read what is written in the law, Jesus tells him: „you have answered right; do this and you will live." The response which Jesus gives to the lawyer involves the same terms as those of his original question – doing (action) and (eternal) life. We are thus led to understand that the action appropriate to inheriting eternal life expresses a tradition of law, a covenantal history, which, as scriptural, involves one in the action of how one reads (or knows) what is written. There is clearly a parallel between the two questions asked by Jesus and the two scriptural passages cited by the lawyer. On the one hand, what is written in the law – Torah – represents the one God of the Israelites whose uniqueness and universality express the ten commandments, the summation (the summit or sum) of which is that you are to love your neighbor as yourself. On the other hand, how you read (or know) what is written in the law is revealed in the action which you bear towards your neighbor. For, as you love God, the other, in utter commitment of self, as yourself, so you love your neighbor, as yourself, in utter commitment, above all others.

It is uncontestable, I think, that God and neighbor – both of whom one is commanded to love with the deepest commitment of self, as, indeed, one's very self – are indistinguishable in their very difference. It is undecidable whether God or neighbor is prior (or posterior) to the other, for each involves and expresses the other: the first will be last and the last will be first. What is written in and how one reads the law involve both God and neighbor, both scriptural tradition and action, the inheritance of which is eternal life. Even when Jesus explicates the lawyer's further question, „And who is my neighbor?", with the parable of the Good Samaritan and then commands the lawyer, „Go and do likewise", he is still explicating the question of what one shall do to inherit eternal life. Eternal life expresses the inheritance (the history) of law whose written command to love God and neighbor involves one in the question of reading, of knowing what is written. But how do you read (know) what is written in the law? Clearly, only by loving God as yourself and your neighbor above all others – with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind. God and neighbor, Scripture (writing) and reading, the law (the command) of eternal life and doing (living) it – such are the concepts which articulate what I have called elsewhere the dialectic of biblical critique, that of existence and interpretation.

My aim in this paper is to show how writing, law, reading, and action (doing what is required to inherit, to be the heir to, eternal life), as articulated in Luke 10, provide the structure of interpretation. I also want to show that interpretation, as propounding the question – how do you read (or know) what is written? – involves and expresses an ontology which is consistent with the biblical conception of God and neighbor, the religious and the secular. All persons are neighbors; all neighbors are

persons. There is nobody without a neighbor. There is no one outside the neighbor. There is no(thing) outside the neighbor. In our so-called, secular (post-theological, atheistical) age, the existence of God is readily, easily, conventionally, but also earnestly denied. Yet, who among us today earnestly deny their neighbor, whatever the easy conventions of denial which are ready at hand? Are thoughtful people, those who love their neighbor with all their heart and all their soul and all their strength and all their mind, any more unusual today than in the time of Jesus and the lawyer? Spinoza claims in *The Theologico-Political Tractatus* not to be aware of any prophets living in his own time. (16) Still, since he holds that the certitude or moral truth of prophecy is based primarily not on the images or signs of prophetic revelation but on the right and the good to which the mind of the prophet is solely turned, it is clear that the prophet is the one who, like the Good Samaritan, inherits eternal life by doing it, by loving God and neighbor above all others. (31, 52.)

If, therefore, the prophet is no less the one who reads than the one who writes the law, since both reading and writing the law are involved in the inheritance of eternal life, of *doing*[2] the love of God and neighbor in one's life, we come to see that the biblical canon is at once closed and open. On the one hand, the Bible, for both Jews and Christians, is closed in the end. Yet the Bible is eternally complete(d) in the prophetic, the loving action of its readers, readers both individual and communal. On the other hand, the Bible is complete(d) in the beginning. Yet the Bible is eternally open to historical action, the inheritance of eternal life, which encompasses not only the fifteen hundred or so years of its growth into the canon which Jews and Christians possess today, or even longer if one includes within its development the story of Islam, but also the reading of its written law which constitutes history as the story of the relationship to the other, the neighbor. What I mean to indicate here is that, just as Spinoza can faithfully read the Bible only by making his reading of the written law consistent with the prophetic reading of the written law – or, to paraphrase Hegel, prophets communicate only with prophets – so, in the beginning, Scripture coincides with creation, the creation of God and neighbor. There is no beginning, no creation,

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[2] It is important to note that the Greek word for „do" (what shall I *do* to inherit eternal life?, *do* this and you will live, go and *do* likewise) is *poiein* (to make, do, poetize). For the Bible, action (reading) is poetry, and poetry (the written law) is action: the Word made (poetized as) the covenantal flesh of the neighbor. We can thus see that, when Plato (at the end of the *Republic*) reduces poetry to appearance and Aristotle (in the *Poetics*) elevates appearance to poetry – each utterly consistent with, in his blind opposition to, the other – the entire realm of what for the Bible is action, doing, expression, poetry, communication, community (the covenant of the neighbor) is for the Greek world but unreal appearance whose contradictory opposite is form (Plato) or *nous* (Aristotle). In other words, there is, in the Greek world, neither a theory of action nor a praxis of poetry, the singularly written law of both of which, for the Bible, is the neighbor whom one is commanded to read (poetize, do, love...) as oneself.

outside Scripture, just as there is no Scripture, no writing, outside creation, outside the creativity of beginning. Scripture begins with the story of creation, than which there is none other (or greater). The beginning of creation is the beginning of Scripture, than which there is non other (or greater) written. The story of creation is complete – in six days: yet, in its eternity, bespeaking the seventh day of rest, fulfillment, and thanksgiving, the creative story is unconditionally historical.

In the beginning we still find the written law. There is no beginning prior to Scripture, for the beginning is contained in Scripture, just as there is no Scripture prior to the beginning, for the beginning is written – as our end. Writing is the beginning. In the end we still find ourselves involved in the question of how we read (or know) what is written – in the beginning. There is no end posterior to reading, for the end is contained in reading Scripture, just as Scripture is contained in the end of reading, for the end is reading. Reading is the end.

To comprehend the paradox that in the beginning is scripture and that in the end is reading, that there is no beginning outside Scripture and that there is no end outside reading (or knowing) what is written in Scripture, is to comprehend – and to be comprehended by – the paradox of interpretation. By the paradox of interpretation – the interpretation of paradox – I understand the revealed, the undecidable, the liberating truth that there is no scripture outside its reading and that there is no reading outside Scripture. The end (reading) is in the beginning, and the beginning (writing) is in the end. I do not know whether these claims sound innocent or not. My point, however, in elaborating the Lucan passage about the law written and the law read is to see that there is no Scripture outside its interpretation and that there is no interpretation outside its Scripture. Not only in the beginning is Scripture (or writing) interpretation, but equally in the end is interpretation Scripture. It may seem obvious that (in the beginning) all writing involves interpretation, but is it so obvious that (in the end) all interpretation expresses Scripture, even though we have already seen that beginning and end are as intricately bound together as are God and neighbor, law and action, and writing and reading in the inheritance of life whose eternity involves a temporality which is expressly historical? If, however, all Scripture involves interpretation and all interpretation is expressly scriptural, if there is no writing outside interpretation and no interpretation outside writing, then it will follow that where there is no Scripture, there is no interpretation, and where there is no interpretation there is no Scripture.

Either/or. Either both Scripture and interpretation or neither Scripture nor interpretation. Thus we can say with Paul: either letter (flesh) and spirit, or neither letter (flesh) nor spirit. The spirit of the letter (flesh) is always its interpretation, while the letter (flesh) of the spirit is always what is written. Or we could say with Ezekiel: either a heart of stone or a heart of flesh, or neither a heart of stone nor a heart of flesh. The heart of flesh is always interpretation, while the heart of stone is always what is written. I push these analogies hard, but my point is that there is no letter, no

Scripture, no writing, no heart of stone outside its interpretation and that there is no spirit, no interpretation, no reading, no heart of flesh outside Scripture. In his *Tractatus* Spinoza speaks of the two levels of Scripture in terms of its sense *(sensus)* and its truth. (100) But we are to understand that the dialectic of Scripture and interpretation, of the written law and its reading, is at once embodied (historical) and true. Falsity, of both *sensus* and truth, emerges whenever Scripture (whether letter or spirit) is „read" or „interpreted" without the reading or interpretation involving us in the inheritance of eternal life: go and do likewise. Falsity, of both sensus and truth, equally emerges whenever interpretation claims to express letter or spirit which is not scriptural (or written) and thus does not involve us in the inheritance of eternal life: go and do likewise.

We may anticipate, however, that the lawyer, in the postmodern guise of the secular philosopher or the literary critic, will rise up and put the biblical thinker to the test, asking: Teacher, what does the inheritance of eternal life have to do with me? What does my life have to do with eternity? The biblical thinker answers with two questions: What is the law of writing? How do you read? I terminate this brief dialogue here, but the point I want to make in introducing it is that, whatever the philosopher or the literary critic (the successor of the Israelite lawyer) may say, s/he can give no other answer to these two questions than that of the lawyer, as reported by Luke. There is no life outside the love of God and the love of neighbor, whatever its guises, and the life which involves and expresses the love of God and neighbor is the life eternal, life lived under the eternal command: do this, and you will live; go and do likewise. Eternity, understood biblically, is not opposed to temporality; rather, eternity is temporality comprehended as history, uniting beginning and end, alpha and omega, past and future, linear and circular, self and other, prior and posterior, analytic and synthetic, identity and difference...

But eternal life, comprehended as the command to read others ('writings) as you would have them read you (r writings), wounds from behind. Eternity is the double-edged sword of life, the sword of writing and reading which cuts both ways. The double-edged sword of life is the written law which must be grasped without a handle – read – for all eternity. Jesus said that he came to bring not peace but the sword. The sword of Scripture creating eternal life – the heartfelt love of God and neighbor – cuts both ways precisely because, just as reading is contained in what is written in the law, in the law of writing, so Scripture is contained in its reading, in its interpretation. But, since there is no Scripture outside its interpretation and no interpretation outside Scripture, wherever there is interpretation there must Scripture be and wherever there is Scripture there must interpretation be. I intentionally play upon the relationship between Scripture and writing and between reading – the question: how do you read? – and interpretation. The only text that can be read (or interpreted) is that which is

written – in the law. But for the law to have been written – for the law of writing to have come into existence – it must, always already, have been interpreted. The point – the double-edged sword – to grasp is that, since Scripture, the Bible, the book, writing is eternally its interpretation, it is completed only in its interpretation, just as interpretation is completed only in Scripture. But, since both writing and reading, Scripture and its interpretation, involve and express the love of God and neighbor, wherever the neighbor, the other – God – is present, there are scripture and interpretation; and wherever the love of God and neighbor, the other, is absent, there is neither Scripture nor interpretation. In bringing the sword which, in writing both ways, creates the peaceable kingdom and not the peace which represses the blood of sacrifice – of not only truth but also idols – the Bible brings both Scripture and reading, both writing and interpretation, into existence. The writing of the Bible, which is also its reading, its interpretation, cuts both ways precisely because, just as all writing is contained in the Bible, the Bible is contained in all writing.

The double-edged sword of the Bible, which is its reading, its interpretation, is simultaneously inclusive and exclusive. The Bible includes all writing and reading within its covenant: choose life, not death; and the Bible is included within all writing and reading which are covenantal: go and do likewise. The Bible excludes all writing and reading which are not „writing" and „reading" and is excluded from all writing and reading which are not „writing" and „reading" – precisely because such „writing" and „reading", in that they are not writing and reading, do not bear the dialectic of loving God as yourself and your neighbor in the fullness of your heart. The irony, the paradox of encountering with the Israelite lawyer the revelation that the Bible is simultaneously the law of writing and the law of reading – whose singular command is to love the other as yourself – is that, because writing and reading both constitute and are constituted by the neighbor, the Bible is eternally present where the neighbor is present and is eternally absent where the neighbor is absent. What this means for interpretation is that, like Scripture, like the Bible, like writing, interpretation is always present where the neighbor is present and is utterly absent where the neighbor is absent. It follows, therefore, that there is no interpretation outside the golden rule. The golden rule is never outside interpretation. Indeed, the golden rule is interpretation, and interpretation is the golden rule – the golden rule of writing and reading the law of the neighbor.[3]

My argument, which is consistent, I believe, with the writing and the reading of the prophets and Jesus, for whom all truth resides in reading, in knowing, in doing, in living eternally what is written in the law, is that writing and interpretation (reading), as involved in and expressing the golden rule, are not found outside the Bible and that, where writing and interpretation are found, there the Bible is also found. This argument

[3] I make the golden rule the hermeneutical principle of interpretative practice in my work.

is the burden of my two books, *The Dialectic of Biblical Critique* and *Truth and Interpretation,* and here I can only outline, in schematic form, its central implications. Let me observe, first, however, that it is not the standard authors on hermeneutics, from Schleirmacher on,[4] but the speculative thinkers of modernity, at once theological and philosophical – Descartes, Spinoza, Vico, Rousseau, Kant, Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche – who remain true, whatever their waverings, to the hermeneutics of biblical writing and reading. It is also not Alter, Bloom, or Frye but rather Auerbach, Barfield, and Schneidau who recognize that it is not original participation in nature but final participation in the neighbor which constitutes interpretative practice. As for our modern philosophical writers,[5] they, without exception, so far as I know, in imputing the beginning of thinking, of writing, of reading, of interpretation to the Greeks, evade acknowledging, with Kierkegaard,[6] that, because Socrates is ignorant of the neighbor, he is ignorant of thinking (of philosophy). For, as the lawyer discovered in his conversation with Jesus, thinking has a singular object and a singular subject, which are uniquely and universally the neighbor. But there are thoughtful exceptions: N. O. Brown, Carse, Foss, Miranda. As regards our theological and religious writers, at least those writing from within the Jewish and Christian traditions, they typically adopt one or more of three evasive stances. First, when addressing their own religious tradition, they simply ignore the tradition of the other. Second, when theological writers do address the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, they refuse (when Jewish) to see Christianity as originally Jewish and (when Christian) to see Judaism as originally Christian. Third, when they address problems of universalism, particularism, and pluralism, they evade the neighbor as the answer to the question of how one reads what is written in the law. Theological writers, along with literary theorists, also have insuperable difficulty in recognizing that, precisely because all writing contains the Bible, literature, for example, that of Shakespeare or Milton, is no less inspired, its truth no less a matter of revelation – of the neighbor – than the strongest biblical texts. It is

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[4] I have in mind especially Gadamer and Ricoeur.

[5] E. g. Habermas, Heidegger, Rorty.

[6] „What, then, is the *beautiful* according to our conceptions of love? It is the beloved and the friend. For the beloved and the friend are the spontaneous and direct objects of spontaneous love, the choice of passion and of inclination. And what is *the ugly?* It is the *neighbour,* whom one SHALL love. One SHALL love him – that simple wise man (=Socrates) knew nothing of this; he did not know that one's neighbour exists and that one should love him; what he said about loving the ugly (in the *Symposium*) was only teasing. One's neighbour is the unlovable object, not something to offer to inclination and passion, which turn away from him and say, 'What is that to love!' But for that very reason there is no advantage connected with speaking about having to love the unlovable object. And yet the true love is precisely love to one's neighbour, or it is not finding not the lovable object but finding the unlovable object to be lovable." (342-3)

also the case that thinkers like Girard and Levinas, while recognizing the primacy of biblical religion in both literary and communal life, continue to maintain the binary polarity between religion and philosophy, between faith and reason, forgetting that we are commanded to love God with all our *psyche* and with all our *dianoia*. Derrida's relation to the tradition of modernity is ex-centric, as one would expect. But it is doubtful whether Derrida is truly different from traditional philosophy, as we shall shortly see.

Let me now present, within the severly schematic terms of five headings, the fundamental implications for interpretation of the questions which Jesus puts to the lawyer: What is written in the law? How do you read? I shall restrict myself, under each heading, to a one-sentence formulation (the written law) and to a one-sentence commentary (how one reads). (1) The Bible – Hebrew and Christian, Old Testament and New Testament, First Testament and Second (Last) Testament... – is one book. Whatever the differences between Judaism and Christianity – and these differences are real, vast, and crucially significant – they are utterly different from all extra-biblical differences, for they differ only (absolutely) in their response to the singular questions which Jesus puts to the lawyer about how we read (know) – enact in our lives – what is written in the law of the neighbor. (2) The difference between biblical and extra-biblical traditions of writing and reading, between the Bible and, say, the ancient Greeks, is total, incomparable, and unknowable. This difference cannot be written and cannot be read, for extra-biblical tradition fatally depends upon the unwritten and the unreadable law of contradiction which, whenever it is written (or spoken), fatally reduces the writer (speaker) to the contradictory appearances of ignorance and blindness.[7] (3) The writing and reading tradition of loving God above all others and your neighbor as yourself is, as at once covenantal and incarnational, both faithful and rational, religious and secular, theological and philosophical, philosophical and literary... The reason, conception, knowledge, thinking, the *dianoia* of the lawyer, which is as fully intended by the two questions which Jesus puts to him as is his good faith, is not found in the Greek or any other extra-biblical tradition. (4) The Bible is neither pre-modern (religious) nor post-modern (secular) but is modern, both religious and secular, from beginning to end. Modernity is created by the neighbor who, at once faithful and rational, constitutes the law of writing as the critical law of reading: And who is my neighbor? (5) Interpretation does not exist outside its writing (the Bible), and writing (the Bible) does not exist outside its interpretation. Greek or any other extra-biblical „texts" cannot be interpreted; for, where there is ignorance of the neighbor's existence

[7] I make the difference between what one could here call the „unwritten" (and the „unreadable") law of contradiction and the „written" (and the „readable") law of paradox central to my conception of interpretation.

(where the neighbor does not exist), there is no writing, no letter, no reading, no spirit: interpretation does not exist in the ignorance of the neighbor.

Before closing, it will be fruitful, I think, to reflect briefly on basic ideas of two thinkers which bear significantly on the questions which Jesus puts to the lawyer. The first thinker is early modern, the second late (if not post-) modern. Both thinkers are Jewish, although it is not clear to me that their thinking would properly be characterized as Jewish. Nor would it be clear to me that, although I was baptized and brought up in a family for which church attendance was a significant part of weekly life, my thinking would be properly characterized as Christian. One might, however, typify the thinking which is involved here as Jewish or Christian secularism; or one might simply call it, more cannily, biblical, at least in the case of two of us. In any event, Spinoza and Derrida, for they are the two thinkers whom I have in mind, address the questions which Jesus puts to the lawyer in powerfully arresting terms.

Spinoza is the first and also the last of the great modern thinkers to show that biblical interpretation, how we read the Bible, is absolutely central to philosophy, to both ontology and political theory, to the ethical life of democracy understood as the intellectual love of God. With his basic hermeneutical rule that the Bible, the written law, is to be read (interpreted) from itself alone, Spinoza responds to the questions which Jesus puts to the lawyer – how do you read what is written in the law? – in terms of his concept of sovereignty, which, for him, is at once ontological and political, both philosophical and theological. With his concept of sovereignty – the Bible is sovereign, the reader is sovereign, God is sovereign, the community (of readers) is sovereign, the individual (reader) is sovereign – Spinoza deconstructs all hierarchies, all binary oppositions, above all, the dualism between dogmatism, which subordinates the Bible to reason (the position of Maimonides and his followers), and skepticism, which subordinates reason to the Bible (the position of Maimonides' opponents). Indeed, in explicitly making his aim in *The Theologico-Political Tractatus* the separation of philosophy from theology, what Spinoza demonstrates is that the separation between philosophy and theology can be truly effected only insofar as each is conceived as sovereign, without subordination to the other. In other words, the separation of philosophy from theology (and of theology from philosophy) can be effected solely from a position which is neither philosophical nor theological. For, if the separation between philosophy and theology were effected philosophically, then philosophy would once again be claiming the position of mastering the presence of theology. The same thinking equally applies to theology and to all the other binary opposites or, more simply, dualisms. The sovereign Bible demands a reader who is at once faithful and rational, just as the sovereign reader demands a written law which is at once faithful and rational; and it is precisely this which Jesus demonstrates to the lawyer. The fundamental inadequacy of the weak readings which Strauss and Yovel give of Spinoza is their

failure to recognize that Spinoza is first and last a biblical thinker for whom the neighbor, at once faithful and rational, is the subject and the object of all thinking.[8] It is the neighbor who puts to us the question of how we read what is written in the law.

Perhaps no thinker in our time has posed in more acute terms than Derrida the question of how one reads what is written in the law.[9] He wields with uncanny dexterity and verve the plasticity (the dialectic) inherent in writing as law and in law as writing: the law of writing as what is written in the law. His claim that there is no(thing) outside the text, no(thing) outside writing, no(thing) outside what is written in the law (of writing) appears to be consistent with Spinoza's hermeneutical principle that there is nothing outside the Bible, that the sovereign, biblical text is to be read from itself alone – by the sovereign reader alone. Still, it is not so obvious that Derrida intends or understands either his interpretative principle of self-referentiality to encompass and to be encompassed by the neighbor or the principle that there is nothing outside the love of God and neighbor to constitute the ontological argument for existence. What Derrida does not see is what the lawyer, in conversation with Jesus about how one reads what is written in the law, comes to see, which is that the one thing that cannot be lawfully thought – written – without existing is the sovereign neighbor, whom one is commanded, by the law of writing, to love beyond all others as oneself. Thanks to *(grace à)* the dialectic of writing and law, in which the sovereign reader is totally implicated, Derrida is able to deconstruct with great effectiveness the binary opposites whose originary (immediate) presence constitutes the idolatry of theologocentrism. But he fails, nonetheless, to escape the ultimate binary opposition, that between philosophy and theology, faith and reason, this failure doubtlessly reflecting his Heideggerian blindness to how Spinoza reads what is written in the law as the separation of philosophy from theology.

What Derrida fails to realize is that his notions of the supplement (trace), iterability, difference *(différance)*, undecidability ... all involve the freedom to choose – the neighbor. Choice is not between binary opposites, between good and evil, philosophy and theology, theory and practice, self and other, male and female, the secular and the religious, faith and reason. Choice is always of the good, and thus the question of what one shall do to inherit eternal life becomes, with Winnicott: is the reading good enough?[10] How, in other words, do we (good enough) read (good enough) what is written (good enough) in the (good enough) law? Evil (sin) exists, not because it is

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[8] This is also the fundamental inadequacy of the strong reading which Norris gives of Spinoza.

[9] I discuss Derrida's conception of writing in my study „Tragedy Is – Scription Contra-Diction."

[10] Winnicott makes the „good enough mother" central to the trusting environment supportive of the infant child. The „good enough mother" reads in the infant what is originally and eternally written in the inherent law of life: the neighbor.

chosen, which is impossible, but because it is not chosen. Evil exists precisely because it is the good which is always chosen; and it is the good, as chosen, which reveals how good or evil our choice is. If the good chosen or desired is not the neighbor, then it is evil. It is only in willing the good of the neighbor that the evil of the world is revealed. As Spinoza says, something is good because we desire it. We do not desire it because it is good.[11] (It is not the good, as the original presence of theologocentrism, which determines desire.) Truth (desire, love, the neighbor...) is its own standard, the standard both of itself and of its idols. Truth as its own standard is the neighbor whom you are commanded to love as yourself. The standard of truth is the law of writing which commands you to love, to choose, to desire the other as you would have the other love, choose, and desire you.

Notwithstanding his cunning insight into theologocentrism as harboring the presence of binary opposition, wherein one side of the dualism is privileged over the other, Derrida makes two elementary errors, both typical of (they are found only in) the biblical tradition and both having been, always already, deconstructed by Spinoza. First, he fails to see that the structure of what he calls writing and difference is biblical. What Derrida views as the original sin of identifying the law of writing with presence is for the Bible the contradictory idolatry of reading what is written in the law as other than the paradoxical presence of God and neighbor. Second, he also fails to see that the structure of writing and difference, involving the supplement, trace, iterability..., is not found outside the Bible. The ancient Greek world, like the entire extra-biblical world, is ignorant of the paradox that there is nothing outside the written law, which (who) is my neighbor as the standard of truth. It is uniquely and universally monotheism – the love of the sovereign neighbor – which constantly falls into dualisms whose idols, the binary opposites, reduce either what is written in the law to reason (dogmatism) or reason to what is written in the law (skepticism). For, just as there is nothing outside writing, the law, the biblical text, there is equally nothing inside the text. For the text is at once, and undecidably, inside and outside, always already a supplementary trace, a paradox whose iterability is unthinkable outside, not to mention inside, the Bible.

To recognize that there is no outside the Bible, precisely because there is no inside the Bible (say, with the ignorance of the Socratic *daimon*), is to recognize that the Bible is – undecidably, freely, lovingly – both inside and outside itself. Scripture is closed, for there is the finite, particular Bible which I am reading; yet Scripture is open, for the question of what I shall do to inherit eternal life as the story of the written law is, always: How do you read, know, live, enact, *now,* this very moment, what is written in the law? Writing is limited (closed), for the question – And who is my neighbor? – always involves judgment, decision, limit. Writing is open, different,

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[11] *Ethics,* III. 9. Scholium.

undecidable, supplementary, other, the subject of desire and free choice. There is a time for closure and a time for openness, and that time is history as the inheritance of eternal life.

There is no writing outside Scripture – this is what Spinoza sees and what Derrida fails to see – and there is no Scripture outside writing – including the writing of Spinoza and Derrida. The paradox of the Bible is that, precisely as it is limited to, closed within, what is written in the law, the law of writing, which is the neighbor, it is the limitation to loving God with all your heart and all your soul and all your strength and all your mind and your neighbor as yourself which is infinitely explosive, liberating, revelatory, indeterminable, risky, guilt-producing... The Bible (like its God, its covenant, its people) can be true to itself as its own standard of truth only insofar as it creates, fosters, supports, and encourages difference; but difference, if it is not to fade indiscriminately into indifference or to become hardened into the difference of racial, gender, or class discrimination, is always identifiable, notwithstanding its thousand faces, as the neighbor whom one is commanded to love, whatever the consequences.

Interpretation is constituted by the paradox that reading is both enclosed within yet encloses within itself what is written in the law. Interpretation is both what is written in the law and how one reads what is written in the law. For, indeed, the writing and the reading of the law are undecidably different and identical; for there is no first writing which is not, always already, a final reading, and there is no final reading which is not eternally a first writing. What is first and last, in both writing and reading, is the neighbor. There is no(thing) outside the written law of Scripture. There is (no)thing outside the law of writing. There is no(thing) outside interpretation. Where there is interpretation, there must the Bible be. Where the Bible is, there must the neighbor be. Where the neighbor is, there must interpretation be. Interpretation is the paradox of the neighbor whose scriptural inheritance constitutes the eternal response to the questions: What is written in the law? How do you read?

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LÓRÁNT BENCZE

The Metaphor 'Is Like the Owner of a House Who Takes New and Old Things out of his Storedom'

(On Metaphor and Hermeneutics)

The traditional and most common interpretation of metaphor is based on the simple opposition of literal versus figurative sense. The terms of this dichotomy are also considered alternative and logically disjunctive. The theory of 'reconstruction' relies on these terms and supposes that a text always offers enough proof for deciding which alternative to choose. In the theory of 'deconstruction' the above decision is not required merely as a consequence of oversimplification, i.e. that interpretation is essentially so manifold that it is hardly more than accidental.

Origen set up a trichotomy of interpretation when writing on somatic, psychic and pneumatic senses. Though one may dispute what he meant by these terms, one cannot ab ovo reject the advantage of them in practice and in relation to the traditional and structuralist dichotomy and the vague freedom of deconstruction. Whereas the present author ascribes meanings to Origen's terms, which this way cover the spectrum spanned by the theories mentioned, the main point is that Origen excluded disjunction from interpretation. He thought that the three senses can be together, are inseparable, yet never confused. Some twentieth century opinions on the interpretation of metaphor (e.g. interaction theory) seem to be very close to Origen. At the same time his ideas may launch and stimulate new researches to come.

*

I am going to explain three relationships:

1. Origen vs. ancient rhetoric, especially metaphor;
2. Origen vs. some recent developments in linguistics and rhetoric;
3. Origen vs. a possibility of developing his ideas (based on 1. and 2.).

According to Origen the literal sense of Scripture is an *αἰσθητόν*, i.e. something sensible (cf. Hällström 1984: 47). Those who have only a simple faith (*ψιλὴ πίστις*; ib. 11) are the outer men, the 'simplices'. They have access to the literal sense only. They are impressed by signs and miracles which are also 'sensibilia' and thus 'particulars'. These simplices are literalists, who do not draw inference from Scripture (ib. 35). Thus a story is only a 'history' to the simple reader (ib. 48). The simplices' above way of reading Scripture is a one level model which – in current linguistic terms – corresponds to everyday language behaviour. This behaviour can be qualified stylistically as 'colloquial' or 'informal'. If a husband asks his wife 'Did you open all the windows?', the situation or the language itself do not offer any 'stumbling block' to refer to a non-literal sense: „We mention all these examples in order to show that the purpose of the divine power offering us the holy Scriptures is not only that we understand what the plain text presents to us, for, taken literally, it is sometimes not only untrue but even unresonable and impossible. We wanted to show also that *some extraneous matter has been woven* into the historical

narrative of actual events and *into the code* of laws which are useful in their literal sense ... 'You shall not kill' etc. must be kept literally" (Philocalia III. 4. cf. also Caspary 1979: 13. Italics from the present author). This means that there are references ('stumbling blocks') in texts and in situations which show a reader/listener what kind of level and how many levels of meaning a reader/listener has to face. These references are clearly apprehensible and therefore they are like 'stumbling blocks' or even 'scandals'. Usually every speaker and writer organizes his text in a way that these references guide the reader/listener unambigously (cf. Bencze-Szende 1991), like God did in Scriptures according to Origen:

> ᾠκονόμησέ τινα οἱονεὶ σκάνδαλα καὶ προσκόμματα καὶ ἀδύνατα δυὰ μέσου ἐγκαταταχθῆναι τῷ νόμῳ καὶ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ ὁ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγος

(in Latin: offendicula, inconvenientia, interruptio. De principiis 4.2.9. p. 321).

I categorize these references (i.e. 'stumbling blocks', 'scandals' etc.)

a. in linguistic terms, i.e. they can appear on phonemic, morphemic, lexemic, syntactic, sentence, utterance and 'turn' levels;
b. in semiotic terms, i.e. they can appear on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic levels;
c. in rhetorical or discourse analytical terms, i.e. they can appear on situational/contextual levels (who speaks/writes, to whom, about what etc.).

If one says e.g. „Don't pull my leg", the absence of the plural suffix *s* in the word leg unambigously declares the sentence as an idiom to every native reader/speaker of English, i.e. a morphemic and syntactic reference in the language blocks the reader's/listener's way to a literal interpretation. On the other hand inadvertent readers/listeners, as well as uneducated people and children are inclined to follow the one level model of Origen's „simplices" as a rule, even if there happens to be a „stumbling block" to refer to a non-literal level. In this way some old Hungarian peasent women sent money to Isaura, the slave girl in a television series. The women disregarded the obvious „stumbling block" that is was a television play, – not a documentary film. A touring company in the last century had a performance in a village. In the drama that they played Hungarians faught against Turks. The imitation of fighting was so successful that the peasents in the audience ran up to the stage to help the Hungarians and actually bit the actors dressed as Turks. In 1989 live-shows, earlier unknown in the countryside, were staged at Lake Balaton. Once a man from the audience went up to the couple playing and pushed the actor aside saying: „I realized that your were unable to make love with her, I can do it". Everyone knows that children feel endangered by thrillers, horror and criminal stories for the same reason. This means that sometimes some people fail to recognize „stumbling blocks", „look outs" or references of the linguistic, semiotic or rhetorical levels, i.e. a television broadcast, a theatre performance or a show respectively. Mentally ill people. e.g. schizophrenics stick to the literal sense extremely rigidly. If the doctor's surname is Dr. Cutter, they think he will cut them into pieces (cf. Bencze 1985: 405). This is a pathological inadvertence. If this „inadvertence" is deliberate in normal speech, it can be a joke for the speakers (cf. Fónagy 1982). To sum up the one level model of interpretation I compare a text or discourse to a textile. In the one level model one picks up a textile an pulls out only one thread. The

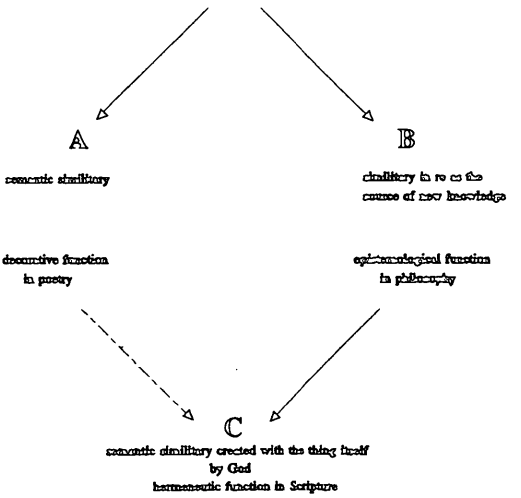
reason for this is that there is either no „stumbling block" in the text to prevent him, as in the everyday speech of a couple, or one disregards the „stumbling block" and pulls out the one thread of meaning from the woven text in which there are many threads.

There is a special case of the deliberate reduction of several levels to one and literal level. This has dangerous consequences in politics, mass media and society, and is called manipulation. A classical example of this was to consider the rebuke of the Apostle Peter a merely literal, historical and thus particular case by the fathers of the Constantinian era. Consequently the story of Peter and the sword in the Gospels (Luke 22:38, 49–51; Matthew 26: 51–52), especially the logion of Jesus in it – „All who take the sword die by the sword" – had no general doctrine (cf. Caspary 1979: 106). Consequently Origen's principle of „stumbling blocks" built in Scripture can be extended to every text and discourse and could prove a fruitful principle in various disciplines which deal with text/discourse (in literary criticism, linguistics, rhetoric, etc.).

„... to understand why Origen adopted some particular doctrine and formulated it in a particular way, regarding it as a true and legitimate interpretation of a Christian belief, one would have to be imbued oneself with the doctrines and methods of Greek philosophy" (de Faye 1929: 179). „Porphyry was not mistaken in regarding him as a Greek philosopher who had gone astray among the Christians" (ib.). „The thought of Origen is wholly permeated with Greek philosophy" (ib.). His thought is „manifestly composed of divers elements" of Alexandrian erudition (ib. 169) which included Plato, Aristotle, the Stoic, the Peripatetic, the Pythagorean and Neoplatonic schools, and last but not least Philo (ib. 170) and gnosticism (ib. 132). This is well known by scholars (cf. Pesty 1989a, 1989b). Here I would like to point to some elements which have not been investigated and which are relevant to Origen's trichotomy of interpretation and to the concept of metaphor.

Aristotle's concept of metaphor includes not only a poetic or decorative function; metaphor is primarily a means of obtaining new knowledge about the world (cf. Bencze 1983: 277–278): „Now strange words simply puzzle us; ordinary words convey only what we know already; it is from metaphor that we can best get hold of something fresh. When the poet calls old age 'a withered stalk' (Odyssey XI. 213), he conveys a new idea, a new fact, to us by means of the general notion of 'lost blossom', which is common to both things" (Rhetoric 1410b. Transl. by W. Rhys Roberts). The fresh and new knowledge which one can get from metaphor obviously corresponds to the higher and additional knowledge and meaning which Origen called spiritual (or psychic), and which is not available fo the simplices but only fo the erudite minority of the faithful (cf. De principiis. III. 6,6). (To the problem of why Origen did not like to use the term metaphor, see below). Quintilian followed Aristotle's dichotomy in defining the functions of metaphor: „... *there are some* (i.e. tropes) which are intended solely to the purpose of embellishment (*eruntque quidam tantum ad speciem accomodati;* VII. VI. 5. Present author's italics), ... some are for the sake of meaning, others for the sake of decoration" (quosdam gratia significationis, quosdam decoris assumi; VIII. VI. 2), ... tropes employed to express our meaning involve ornament as well, though the converse is not the case (qui significandi gratia adhibentur esse et ornatum, sed non idem accidet contra), ... to make our meaning clearer ... or to produce decorative effect" (quia significantius est aut decentius; VIII. VI. 6. Transl. by M.

E. Butler in Quintilian 1953–1960. cf. Bencze 1989: 699–700). Though Quintilian followed Aristotle's dichotomy, there is a significant difference between their views which has been neglected by scholars. While Aristotle quoted Homer to prove that metaphors have not only a decorative function but also an epistemological function even in poetry, Quintilian divided the two functions rigidly and alternatively. The roots of a certain distinction of the two functions and of the whole problem may be traced back earlier than Aristotle. The decorative function may have dominated in poetry and the epistemological function in philosophy: „Metapher bei Homer noch ganz im Dienst der dichterischen Aussage stehen, bei Heraklit aber bereits formelle Erkenntnisfunktionen übernehmen" (Bruno Snell: Die Entdeckung des Geistes. Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen, 1955. 258–298. Quoted by Biser 1970: 43). The consequence of the clearcut division of the two function was that the decorative function was preserved in the tradition of European stylistics (cf. Bencze 1989: 699; Richards 1936/1970: 90), while a special development of the epistemological function was preserved in hermeneutics. The division of the functions of metaphor (in a wider sense, i.e. tropes):



A and *C* can happen to overlap each other from time to time in language but an interpreter of Scripture has to avoid relating *A* and *C* because in the case of *C* a thing is a part of divine creation, and as such, it has an inherent objective truthvalue (cf. Spitz 1972: 11, and below principles and consequences No. 6. cf. also Thiselton 1986: 82).

According to Origen the details of literal meaning correspond to the details of hidden meaning (cf. Pesty 1989b: 62). This reminds us of the definition of proportional or

analogical metaphor by Aristotle where the related terms are applied in a way that they correspond to each other (cf. Poetics 1457b, Rhetoric 1407a).

„For just as the human being consists of body, soul, and spirit, so does Scripture..." (Philocalia II. 4. cf. Torjesen 1986: 40, and footnote 51. ib.). According to Danielou (1948: 34) Origen took this trichotomy from Philo (cf. Pesty 1989b: 37). Others denied this when they wrote that Philo's trichotomy concerns only the human being, not Scripture (Pesty 1989b: 39). In this case even the trichotomy of the human being could have been taken from Plato and Aristotle who must have been Philo's sources, too (cf. Bencze 1981: 218; Spitz 1972: 14–19). Origen had a holistic view of Scripture as he considered Scripture as a living human organism (cf. Spitz 1972: 17; cf. also below, principles and consequences No. 1.). Augustin made an extrem use of this trichotomous analogy of human organism. He wrote of „spiritus, anima et corpus", then „mens, notitia, amor", again somewhere else „memoria, intellectus, voluntas", and in a dynamic formulation „esse, nosse, velle". These trichotomies of the one human personality reflect the Holy Trinity of the one God (cf. Bencze 1981: 218).

Origen's trichotomy of interpretation was also rooted in the trichotomy of style types (genera orationis) of ancient rhetoric, which distinguished the simple, the middle and the grand style (e.g. Cicero 1968[IV. VIII. 11, IV. XI. 16). The simple style is brought down to the most ordinary speech of every day (ib. IV. X. 14). Origen's addition was that he connected this most ordinary speech of every day to the most ordinary people of every day, i.e. to simplices. Medieval rhetoric went on this way when it connected style-types even to characters and to social classes and environment (cf. John of Garland: low style – leisurely shepherd, crook, sheep, pasture, beech. Garland 1974: 41).

When Origen stated that typological interpretation is no longer practicable in the New Testament (Hällström 1984: 55), he took over the principle of classical rhetoric that the type of speech influences interpretation: „... each kind or rhetoric has its own appropriate style. The style of written prose is not that of spoken oratory..." (Aristotle: Rhetoric 1413b. Transl. W. Rhys Roberts). The current term in discourse analysis is text-type and in literary theory genre. Origen also distinguished literal and spiritual levels from the point of view of readers, not only from the point of view of text-type (cf. „Secondly, persuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions...„. Aristotle: Rhetoric 1356a. Transl. W. Rhys Roberts). Spiritual laziness is a character of common people, one might say „uneducated people", while the spiritual level demands „laborious preparation", one might say a kind of „education and scholarship". This means that interpretation depends on the circumstances, i.e. „circumstantiae" in rhetoric: quis, quid, ubi, quibus auxiliis, cur, quomodo, quando, – who, what, where, by what means, why, how and when. These factors are called „situation" in recent discourse analysis and in the rhetoric of mass media. Thus starting from Origen's method of relying upon classical rhetoric and continuing his method I would suggest that future hermeneutics should rely upon the achivements of twentieth century discourse analysis and on the rhetoric of mass media and advertisements. I believe that social determination plays a dominant role in interpretation even if grammar and semantics remain prerequisites (cf. De principiis IV,2,1: p. 306), whereas grammar and semantics exist under the influence of society.

The above statements show that I want to draw attention to Origen's well-known hermeneutical principles in a way that they are sine qua nons of the interpretations of every discourse and text, not only of Scripture.

Other principles and consequences are as follows:

1. The possibility of not only one level but several levels of meaning simultaneously. The possibility of several levels itself is of course not Origen's discovery but of someone who first made poetry, the first homo sapiens sapiens, Adam in the Bible. As far as rhetoric is concerned it was discussed long before Origen by philosophers, e.g. by Aristotle, under the term metaphor in Poetics and Rhetoric. Origen's achievement is the holistic view in the simultaneity of levels which he stressed several times (cf. above, e.g. in De principiis I. 2,4–5):

> Ἀλλ' ἐπεί εἰσί τινες γραφαὶ τό σωματικὸν οὐδαμῶς ἔχουσαι, ὡς ἐν τοῖς ἐξῆς δείξομεν, ἔστιν ὅπου οἰονεὶ τήν ψυχὴν καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τῆς γραφῆς μόνα χρὴ ζητεῖν. καὶ τάχα διὰ τοῦτο αἱ ἐπὶ καθαρισμῷ τῶν Ἰουδαίων »ὑδρίαι« κεῖσθαι λεγόμεναι, ὡσ ἐν τῷ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγελίῳ ἀνέγνωμεν, »χωροῦσιν ἀνὰ μετρητὰς δύο ἢ τρεῖς« αἰνισσομένου τοῦ λόγου περὶ τῶν παρὰ τῷ ἀποστόλῳ »ἐν κρυπτῷ Ἰουδαίων«, ὡς ἄρα οὗτοι καταρίζονται διὰ τοῦ λόγου τῶν γραφῶν, ὅπου μὲν »δύο μετρητάς«, τὸν ἵν' οὕτως ἔπω ψυχικὸν καὶ τὸν πνευματικὸν λόγον, χωρούντων, ὅπου δὲ »τρεις«, ἐπεί τινες ἔχουσι πρὸς τοῖς προειρημένοις καὶ τὸ σωματικὸν οἰκοδομῆσαι δυνάμενον.

Simultaneity at least implicitely includes the mutual influences of levels of meanings, a possibility of interference of them, a permanent and dynamic revaluation of phenomena on various levels just like in metaphors (Bencze 1981: 216–217).

2. There are more texts that have only literal meaning than the ones which have other extra meanings:

> πολλῷ γὰρ πλείονά ἐστι τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν ἀληθευόμενα τῶν προσυφανθέντων γυμνῶν πνευματικῶν.

(De principiis IV. 3,4: p. 329). „Multo enim plura sunt, quae secundum historiam constat, quam ea quae nudum sensum continent spiritalem." This principle is perhaps more valid if we extend it to all kinds of texts, not only to biblical ones. (As far as the difference between the terms literal and historical, *σωματικόν* and *κατὰ τὴν ἱστορίαν*, cf. No. 5. below and Caspary 1979: 16).

3. In certain text-types, e.g. in poetry and in fiction, everything can have a second level of meaning, but not all of the text has a literal meaning as Origen wrote on the Bible: „... our opinion talking of this is that everything in the divine Scriptures has a spiritual meaning but not everything has a literal one" (De principiis IV. 3,5; 331. Transl. by the present author. – *διακείμεθα γὰρ ἡμεις περί πάσης τῆς θείας γραφῆσ, ὅτι πᾶσα μὲν ἔχει τὸ πνευματικόν, οὐ πᾶσα δὲ τὸ σωματικόν.*

4. In a text various items with various levels of meaning are woven into an integral whole. „Origen follows a certain strain of Hellenistic rhetoric and believes, that the Old Testament, like the Iliad, has woven into its narrative certain myths and allegories" (De Principiis IV. 2,9: 321. – Caspary 1979: 14).

5. „It is a well-known fact that Origen is not very consistent in his terminology" (Hällström 1984: 11). It may be illuminating and essential for future hermeneutical research to see when and to what extent he is consistent or he is not.

A. It is quite obvious that opposed to the everyday one level model (cf. above), which has been considered as the most common - with or without good reason -, and opposed to the two level model, i.e. the dichotomy of literal vs. figurative, which has dominated European thinking and not only primary and secondary but even higher education, - Origen clearly set up a trichotomy: σωματικόν, ψυχικόν, πνευματικόν (cf. De principiis IV. 2,2; IV. 2,4; IV. 2,5; pp. 312,314, 317).

B. The reason for the confusion here is that Origen himself regularly used only two levels in his practice, e.g. spiritaliter sive secundum litteram (II. 11,5; p. 189), figuraliter vel spiritaliter (II. 11,2; p. 185).

C. This practice lead to the strong dichotomy of the above mentioned European tradition, which at the same time followed Origen also in his theory of trichotomy. The tradition changed both the order (cf. below 5.D.) and the terms:

expositio **historica, moralis, mystica**

corpus, anima, spiritus (Origenes: Homiliae in Exodum, In Genesim. hg. v. A. Baehrens, Leipzig, 1920: 1. 279. In: Meyer-Suntrup 1987: 224).

juxta **historiam(litteram)**, juxta intelligentiam **spiritalem**, juxta **tropologicam** (Hieronym. Epistulae. hg. v. Isidorus Hilberg, Wien-Leipzig, 1912. 1-515. Commentarii in Ezechielem. hg. v. Francisens Glorie. Turnhout, 1964. 3-743. In: Meyer-Suntrup 1987: 224-225.)

historical, allegorical, tropological-moral (St. Gregor the Great, Venerable Bede. In: Meyer-Suntrup 1987: 225.)

historical, allegorical, anagogic (Venerable Bede. In: Meyer-Suntrup 1987: 225.)

secundum **litteram,** iuxta **allegoriam,** secundum **futurum** beatitudinem (Hieronym. Commentarii in prophetas minores. In: Meyer-Suntrup 1987: 225.)

Old testament - past, New testament - present, Eternal Gospel - future (cf. Hällström 1984: 55).

D. The three levels have also a proper order (cf. Caspary 1979: 15), which is hierarchic. The direction of this hierarchy depends on the starting point, however, this starting point differs in theory and in practice. The spiritual is of the highest value, yet in the procedure of an individual reading it can be the last phase: metanoia from letter to spirit (cf. Caspary 1979: 16, and „simplices" above). This approach is very similar to the Aristotelian epistemological principle which was formulated in the Middle Ages as follows: Nihil est in intellectu, quod prius non fuerat in sensibus.

E. If one considers Origen's trichotomy as a threefold classification one has to say that the criteria were not consistent from every point of view. The literal level was basically linguistic (grammatic and semantic). The second and third levels were supported by psychological, speculative religious and literary theoretical arguments. The (later) criteria of Old Testament, New testament, Eternal Gospel, and of past, present, future respectively were attractive for a theological attitude but opacated the trichotomy for a logical approach.

F. The inconsistency and confusion were increased by Origen's term of types – τύποι (De Principiis IV. 2,6; P: +L/), typical – τυπικῶς (ib. p. 318/4), and allegories (ib. IV. 2,6; pp. 316–317) in the sense that St. Paul interpreted Abraham's sons and wives (To the Galatians 4, 21–31. cf. also New Testament, Old Testament, Eternal Gospel above 7/C.). Probably the „interference of a 'typological' with an 'allegorical' vocabulary" (cf. Danielou and de Lubac, cited by Caspary 1979: 15) lead to the medieval fourfold model: historical, allegorical, tropological/moral, anagogic (Pope Gregory the Great: Homilia in Ezechielem prophetam. In: Meyer–Suntrup 1987: 338; cf. also LaSor 1986: 58).

G. In addition even the allegorical meaning may not be simple: two, three or even four concurrent level of meaning may be found in some passages (Comment. in Matthaeum XV. 3. In: Chadwick 1966: 75; cf. also the Song of Songs: lovers vs. God and Israel, Christ and Church, Logos and individual soul respectively). Venerable Bede may have followed this in distinguishing three spiritual levels: allegorical, tropological/moral, anagogic (In Samuelem prophetam. In: Meyer–Suntrup 1987: 225).

H. It is also quite clear that the term historical and literal – σωματικός are not simply synonims. The difference is based on text-type (genre) again: If a story is interpreted as a real story that took place in the past, then we face the historical level. If the text consists of laws or instructions (νομοι) which must be taken literally, we face the literal (σωματικός) level.

I. κατὰ τὴν λέξιν could have concerned written texts and τὸ ῥητόν oral texts (De Principiis IV. 3,5; 331). It is unlikely that Origen made this distinction, yet the two expressious contain the possibility of it for us in the twentieth century.

6. Origen's trichotomy and his and others' later practice of dichotomy is also very similar to Aristotle's trichotomy of words and his and his followers' practice of dichotomy (e.g. Cicero and Quintilian: literal vs. metaphorical): „In the language of prose besides the regular (κύριον) and proper (οἰκεῖον) terms for things, metaphorical terms can be used with advantage" (Rhetoric 1404b. Transl. by W. Rhys Roberts). This means that according to Aristotle there are three types of words from the point of view of clarity, of the type of style an of the „usual-unusual" (ξενικόν): κύριον, οἰκεῖον, μεταφορά. The kyrion usage appears when the word has its own, dominant, generally used meaning in the text, as Horace also wrote: „Non ego inornata et dominantia nomina solum verbaque, Pisones, satyrarum scriptor amabo" (Horace 1969: 234). This concept of kyrion-dominans corresponds to the somatikon interpretation of the simplices.

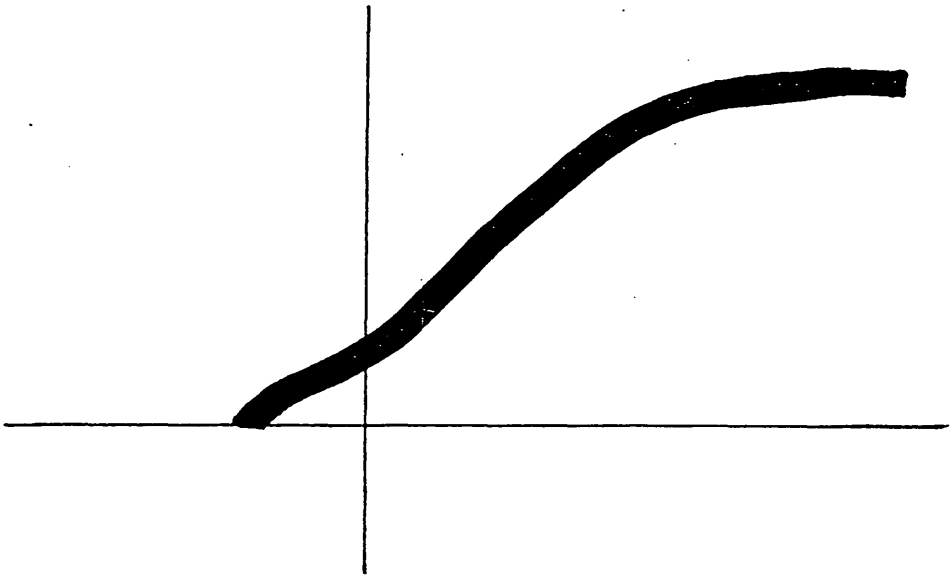
The oikeion usage appears when the meaning of the word is the most proper in a given context as Cicero wrote: „... quae propria sunt et certa quasi vocabula rerum paene nata cum rebus ipsis" (Cicero 1931: III. 149). This is the case when a word is so appropriate and exact as if it has been born with the named thing itself. Cicero's wording here („born with the thing itself") reminds us of the wording of hermeneutic tradition („sense created with the thing by God"; cf. above and below).

The metaphorical usage relies upon the kyrion usage. One has to realize whether a word is metaphorical in a given context or is not, whether e.g. a genus is a genus (i.e. kyrion) or a genus is used instead of one of its species, i.e. used metaphorically (cf. Aristotle: Topica 139b. The term metaphor is used by Aristotle in its wider sense, i.e. it

covers the tropes of Quintilian). Therefore I am convinced that a. the terms oikeion and kyrion are not synonyms in Aristotle's writings, b. the main cause of confusion here is the inconsistency of translation (except Hamilton–Fyfe; cf. Bencze 1983: 275–276).

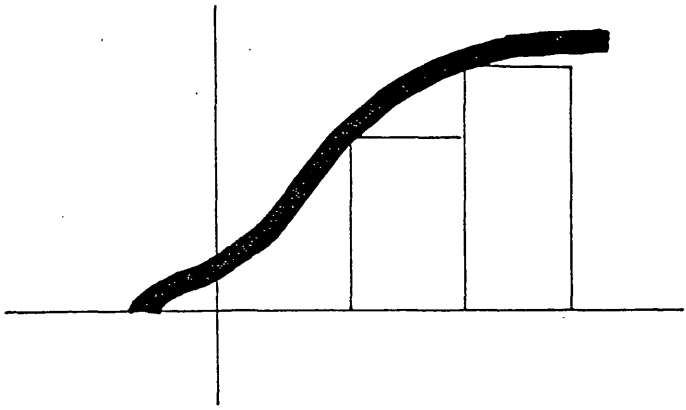
If one uses only words of kyrion his style will be „low/mean". If one uses only metaphors his style will be enigmatic (cf. Aristotle's Poetics 1458a). Here the term „low/mean" style reminds us of the simplices, as it includes a qualification „low/mean", and the semantic features of „common" (kyrion), of a „beginning stage". Thus Aristotle's trichotomy and his sketchy remarks on his trichotomy were very much discussed by him from the point of views of apprehension and of interpretation. In doing so Aristotle may have opened the way for Origen to set up his trichotomy of apprehension and interpretation. I want to emphasize again that this does not really contradict the fact that the term „metaphor" was used rather rarely by Origen and that he opposed κύριος to κατάχρησις 'abusage'. It was important for him to draw the line between pagan aesthetic, rhetoric and Christian interpretation (cf. Neuschäfer 1987: 221–224) and to make a sharp theoretical distinction between an aesthetical/rhetorical speciality in language and a general feature of language itself (ib. 234). He usually avoids the terms allegory and metaphor because the deep sense of the Scripture is not a figurative decoration but an inherent new information in the language (cf. ib. 237, and above „born with the thing itself"). On the other hand Origen's distinction κύριος vs. κατάχρησις is rooted in Stoic linguistics (cf. Barwick 1957/1958: 88).

7. Both the introduction of more than three levels (cf. 5.F) and sublevels (cf. 5.G) were – at least in theory – not necessarily a matter of confusion and inconsistency. „There is in fact a scale of apprehension" (Chadwick 1966: 74) and of interpretation. Again in theory the more delicate a scale, a gradation, a classifying is, and the more levels we can distinguish, the more delicate and an the more accurate our interpretation will be. However close the three or more levels can get to each other in certain cases, like in Origen's exegesis of the sword in which he may have failed according to Caspary (Caspary 1979: 105), delicacy is a merit and not a failure (cf. Jasper 1989: 94). An analogy of mathematical functions can illustrate the significance of delicacy and the future task of hermeneutical research. Suppose text is a continous function:

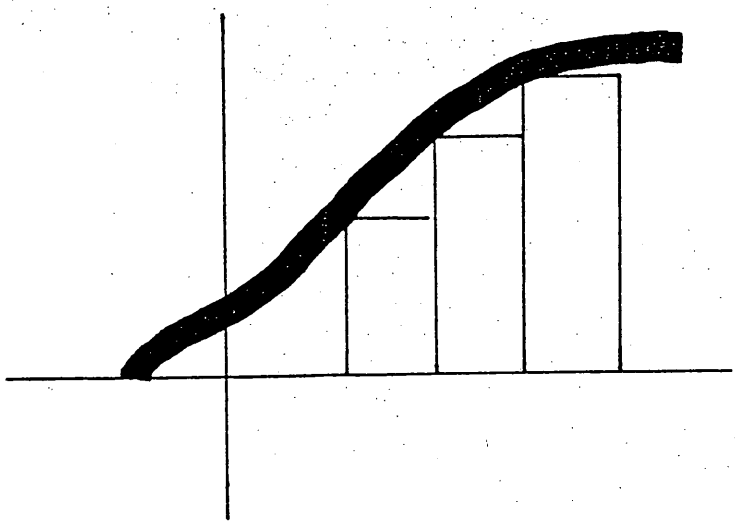


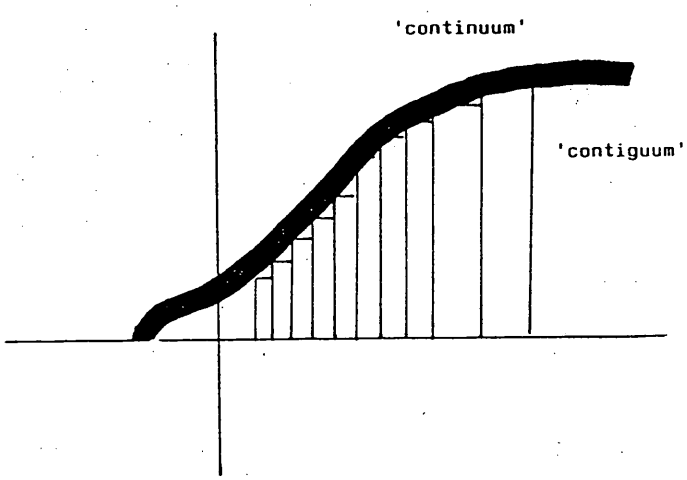
continuous curve - text
area which lies beneath the curve - the underlying meaning of the text

We can approximate the area/text which lies beneath the curve with various interpretation delicacy. E.g. with two levels (literal vs. figurative, or poetic vs. non-poetic; cf. Ricoeur 1977: 209, cited by Jasper 1989: 92):



With three levels **(somatikon, psychikon, pneumatikon):**





With several levels according to ad hoc demands, reader's demand, text-type/genre demand (future research to do):
(This method of finding the area under a curve is called Lebesque integration, i.e. the method of using more and more levels to approximate the area enclosed by the curve). [(Paul Boisen, Dept. of Mathematics, Univ. of Minnesota. Personal communication)]
Thus we can achieve a „sensus plenior" and a more and more plenior sensus (cf. LaSor 1986).

Any type of scaling or gradation can be fruitful and even desiderable and justifiable depending on the individual text, individual interpreter, etc. (cf. social determination, etc. above; cf. Ricoeur 1981/1984: 56). This way between and beyond the simple and widespread dichotomy (literal vs. figurative), between and beyond subjectivism vs. objectivism, between and beyond the naive and selfcheating reconstruction theory of structuralism in literary criticism, that interpretation can be unambigous based upon

structures, and the vague and shoreless deconstruction theory, that interpretation is limitless, hermeneutics can achieve a scientific, though from time to time not invariant, model of interpretation. Thus hermeneutics could follow the continuum of a text with a contiguum of interpretation that is as delicate in scale as it is ad hoc demanded. Scaling can be modulated and coloured by mixing several criteria inseparably in a way that this procedure will not necessarily end up in confusion (cf. Jasper 1989: 90), which would be expected from a logical point of view. The above quoted „stumbling blocks" on the various linguistic, semantic, semiotic and pragmatic levels offer objective references/„stumbling blocks"/to an interpreter. The number of references can vary according to the interpreter's knowledge of language, knowledge of the world, knowledge of the world of a given text, emotional disposition, text-type, etc., i.e. according to the levels in a given text and in connection to the text/discourse in question (cf. Gadamer 1960/1975: 18, 360).

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TIBOR FABINY

The Literal Sense and the Sensus Plenior Revisited

Oh that I knew how all thy lights combine,
And the configurations of their glory!
Seeing not only how each verse doth shine,
But all the constellations of the story.

This verse marks that, and both do make a motion
Unto a third, that ten leaves off does lie:
Then as dispersed herbs do watch a potion,
These three make up some Christians destinie:

Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in everything
Thy words find me out, and parallels bring,
And in another make me understand.

Stars are poor books and oftentimes do miss:
This book of stars lights to eternal bliss.

George Herbert: *Holy Scriptures II.*

This paper must begin with a confession, if not with a story of conversion. I have always radically rejected the 'literal interpretation' of the Bible because it has always appeared to me as a synonym for literal-mindedness, verbal inspiration or the fundamentalist reading. My recent hermeneutical and literary critical investigations into the meaning of biblical texts, however, have convinced me that a rediscovery of the proper sense of the literal sense is unavoidable. Therefore, the purpose of the present paper is a revisiting of the nature of the „literal sense„ or what frank Kermode, quoting Wallace Stevens, has called the „plain sense of things". (Kermode, 1986).

I. What is the Literal Sense? (Up to the Reformation)

The interpretation of biblical texts has always had to face the perplexing question of defining what is meant by the literal sense of Scripture. As Brevard Childs has recently shown it is both an ancient and a modern problem (Childs, 1976). Jewish exegetes around the fourth century (Longenecker, 1975, 31) began to distinguish between the peshat that is, the plain, straightforward or literal sense of scripture and the derash, that is the applied or homiletical sense. The original meaning of peshat is „to stretch out", „to flatten out", „to extend", „to make it plain", while the derash had

to do with the imaginatively expositional elaboration of the haggada or moral exegesis. According to Raphael Loewe the plain, straightforward exegesis „corresponds to the totality of meaning(s) intended by the writer" (Loewe, 1964, 141). Based on the „spirit" in 2 Corinthians 3:6 early Christian exegetes gradually began to distinguish between the „literal" and the „spiritual" senses of Scripture. The antithesis gramma-pneuma occurs three times in the New Testament, in 2 Cor 3:6; Rom 2:29; Rom 7:6. The first centuries of Christian exegesis were not untouched by the hellenistic dualism of the body and the spirit. It was Origen, the author of the first biblical hermeneutics who, based on the Pauline anthropology in 1 Thess. 5:23 developed the idea of the threefold senses of Scripture: (1) the literal-historical sense (corresponding to the „body" [sarks]; (2) the moral-psychological sense, corresponding to the „soul" [psyche]; (3) the spiritual-allegorical-mystical sense, corresponding to the „spirit" [pneuma]. From time to time Origen dropped the moral sense and used the dualism of the letter and the spirit. For Origen the investigation of the spiritual sense (seeking „secret and hidden wisdom of God") is the highest form of exegesis reserved for a Christian „elite" who have the „mind of Christ" (1 Cor 2:16). According to Origen there are three groups that lapse into literalist or „carnal" misreadings: the Jews, the heretics (Marcion) and the primitive readers because they take the letter at its face-value. Origen illustrated the absurdities of the literalist misreadings with the example of his comments on Genesis. In the 19th century the liberal theologian Adolf Harnack found that Origen had gone too far in his fanciful-imaginative-spiritualist readings, therefore he preferred to choose Marcion rather than Origen's „biblical alchemy". The School of Antioch with Diodore of Tarsus (d.394)) or Theodore of Mopsuestia (c 350-407) protested passionately against the allegorical practice of Origen and the School of Alexandria. They all insisted on the primacy of the literal and the historical sense and intead of allegory they invented the term *theoria* (vision) that would not conflict with the underlying historical sense. Jerome drew strongly on the literal sense of the Antiochians, Augustine did not reject the historical foundation entirely either, though he also drew a sharp distinction between the „carnally " and „spiritually" minded readers of the Bible especially in his *De Spiritu et Littera.* Augustine formally rebuked Philo's allegorizing but unconsciously he frequently adopted it by baptizing it. Thus he bequeathed a massive but frequently Platonistic exegetical tradition to the Middle Ages.

The idea of the *Quadriga,* the four sense of Scripture (literal, allegorical, moral, anagogical) goes back to John Cassian (c365-c435) a contemporary of Augustine, but it gained dominance throughout the Middle Ages. Due to the industrious research of Beryl Smalley we have come to know much about the re-emphasis of the literal sense by the Victorine school near Paris in the early twelfth century. Its most important representative, Hugh of St. Victor was strongly influenced by the Jewish exegete Rashi who had clearly distinguished between *peshat* and *derash* in order to free the Hebrew Bible from Christian allegorization. Hugh emphasized throughout his works, especially

in his *Didascalicon*, that a good exegete should always begin with the literal or the historical sense.

Thomas of Aquinas divided the senses of Scripture into literal and spiritual, the literal being conveyed by the words (*litterae* or *verba*) and the spiritual by the things (*res*) of Scripture. This Thomistic dualistic distinction seems to survive even in the recent 1990 edition of *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* where Raymond Brown defines the literal sense as follows: „The sense which the human author directly intended and which his words conveyed." (Brown, 1990, 1148). And the spiritual (or typical) sense is defined as: „the deeper meaning of the 'things' written about in the Bible when they are seen to have foreshadowed future 'thing' in God's work of salvation". (Brown, 1990, 1156). Aquinas stresses that the spiritual sense involves the allegorical, moral and anagogical senses.

An even more radical defence of the literal sense comes from Nicholas of Lyra (1270-1340), who never failed to acknowledge his debt to Rashi and the *hebraica veritas*. James Preus has demonstrated that Lyra in his fight against endless allegorizing invented the idea of *duplex sensus litteralis,* the double literal sense. Quoting 1 Chron. 17:13 „I will be a father to him" and its New Testament „fulfilment" in Heb. 1:5, Lyra stresses that this text refers both to Solomon and Christ because the letter can appeal to a second literal sense which is just as literal as the first. (Preus, 1969, 78). So there is a „Hebrew" and a „Christian" sense: Solomon being the historico-literal while Christ the edifying literal sense. Preus finds that this is „the first time... a New Testament reading of an Old Testament passage is dignified with the label 'literal'". (Preus, 1969, 69).

„If Lyra had not sung, Luther would not have danced" (Si Lyra non lyrasset, Lutherus non saltassed), runs the proverb. Though the medieval Luther in his exegesis of the Psalms drew heavily on the four senses of Scripture, later he radically refused the *Quadriga* and rejected *allegorizare* as „origenisare" stressing the exclusive significance of the literal sense. Luther believed in the „plain sense" of Scripture and found that the „Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth". Erasmus, however, asked „if it is all so plain, why have so many excellent men for so many centuries walked in darkness?" (Kermode, 182-3). For Luther the literal meaning was basically the only meaning but his interest was not exclusively in the *sensus litteralis,* as for Lyra or the Jewish exegetes, but *sensus litteralis propheticus,* implying the *testimonia* or *promissio* which we could call the prophetic aspect of the literal sense. So Luther's Old Testament exegesis is profoundly future-oriented and christological: the Old Testament is thus a testimony to Christ; the reader is supposed to read „was christum treibet". Luther's hermeneutical divide as Preus has shown, is not between the letter of the Old Testament and the spirit of the New, but is already within the Old Testament which contains both laws and promises. (Preus, 1969,201-11). Against the „carnal intelligence"

Luther emphasized the „spiritual" insights. But this attitude is substantially different from the scholastic distinction between literal and spiritual meanings. Luther understood the Old Testament in terms of faith (*analogia fidei*) and thus he could discern christologically the future gaze in „the faithful synagogue". The Old Testament faith becomes „a model and example for the self-understanding of the Christian community, and the Christian believer". (Preus, 1969,211). For Luther the act of reading just as the act of understanding, was an act of faith. The distinction for Luther is not the spirit and the letter but the spirit in the letter. The exegete must draw out the spirit from the letter. „The spirit turns into the letter, but the letter must in its turn constantly become its spirit again". (Ebeling, 1972,99).

There has been one technical term among the Reformers that probably best suited Luther's *sensus litteralis propheticus* and this term was the „scope" of biblical texts. According to William Perkins the „places of Scriptures are expounded by the analogy of faith, by the words, scope and circumstances of the place". (Perkins, 1989,310-1). Gerald T. Sheppard has recently argued that „scope" as a technical term was a part and parcel to Reformation hermeneutics. One of the hermeneutical rules of Matthias Flacius Illyricus' (1520-1575) monumental *Clavis Scripturae* said that the literal sense was to be disclosed „by the scope, purpose, or intention of the whole book". (Sheppard, 1991, 48). The Protestant Reformers spoke not of the scope of the author, but always about the scope of a text, a passage, place, story, chapter, or book. Sheppard has shown that the „scope" comes from the Greek skopos meaning „to oversee", „to survey", „to aim at". „By means of the 'scope' one discerns the centre of a target at which one aims a weapon, or, in hermeneutical terms, one can determine the aim, intent, or central purpose of a text". (Sheppard, 1989, LX). Athanasius is said to have accused the Arians of missing the „scope" of some texts. „Scope" was meant to express how the parts of a book interrelated, how they corresponded to the perspective of the total work. The Reformers' use of „scope", says Sheppard, is not an idiosynchrasy inspired by the Greek fathers, but reflects a wide-ranging, text-oriented proposal common to a perception of textuality of Scripture during the post-Reformation period in Europe, England and New England". (Sheppard, 1989, LXIV). This implies that by means of the „scope" the *sensus litteralis* is being expanded as beyond the bare signification of words it embraces also that which is thereby signified: the literal sense implies its own figural exposition. The analogy of faith is necessary to discern the figural dimensions o the literal sense. For William Perkins as fo the other Reformers both the proper and figural expositions belong to the literal sense, which he calls „the full sense of the Holy Ghost". (LXI).

However, this text-oriented (and not author-oriented!) literal sense with its notion of the „scope" seems to have vanished by the end of the 17th century. The literal sense has survived but with some major distortions at least from two aspects.

II. The Distortions of the Literal Sense

The idea of the literal sense has undergone some major alterations in the 18th century. We can speak about a populist and a scholarly distortion. Both are, perhaps, rooted in the emergence of what Northrop Frye calls the descriptive-demotic phase o language.

a) POPULIST LITERALISM

According to Frye the descriptive-demotic phase of language begins roughly in the sixteenth century, but „attains cultural ascendency in the eighteenth". (Frye, 1982, 13). Within this phase biblical language is seen as referential and the criterion of „truth" is the accurate matching or correspondence of biblical language with the „outside" world. Frye writes,

> With the general acceptance of demotic and descriptive criteria in language, such literalism becomes a feature of anti-intellectual Christian populism. This attitude says, for example, that the story of Jonah must describe a real sojourn inside a real whale, otherwise we are making God, as the ultimate source of the story, into a liar. (Frye, 1982, 45).

Fundamentalism with its doctrine of inerrancy, as Barr and others (Barr, 1977; Barr, 1984; Marsden, 1980) have shown us, is basically a 20th century phenomenon. But the *Die Bibel hat doch recht* mentality that aims to substantiate belief rationally by „proofs" as „historical evidences" that confirm the „letter" of Scripture, is, in my view, rooted in 18th century populist literalism. Brevard Childs argued more than thirty years ago that the idea of exactness of correspondence in the prediction and fulfilment formula is alien from the Hebrew view of fulfilment:

> It is non-Hebraic thinking which tries to relate prophecy and fulfillment in terms of exactness of correspondence based on a Greek theory of truth. The Hebrew view of fuilfillment does not consider them as two independent entities whose relation is determined by an external criterion. (Childs, 1958, 267).

A literary critical perspective can help us to overcome this populist literal-mindedness. With Northrop Frye we can say that it is a fallacy to regard the literal meaning as simply the descriptive meaning. Populist or centrifugal literalism is an „externalized

literalism" because it subordinates „words" to „real things". (Frye, 1982, 61). On the contrary,

> the primary and literal meaning of the Bible ... is its centripetal or poetic meaning... This primary meaning, which arises simply from the interconnection of words, is the metaphorical meaning... In the Bible the literal meaning, first by tautology, in the context in which all literal meaning is centripetal or poetic; secondly, in a quite specific sense of confronting us with explicitely metaphorical and other forms of distinctively poetic utterance... (Frye, 1982, 61–62).

Frye had shown already in the *Anatomy* that the literal meaning of a poem (e.g. of Dante's Comdey) is not its historical reference, a simple description of what really happened, but the whole poem: „the literal basis of meaning in poetry can only be its letters, its inner structure of interlocking motifs". (Frye, 1957, 77).

b) HISTORICIST RECONSTRUCTION

The all-inclusive aspect of the literal sense perceived by the Reformers has been distorted not only from below, but also from above, by high criticism. Sheppard has recently argued that both literalism and liberalism are products of modernism: „fundamentalism is a position advocating the right wing of modernism, old liberalism being on the left". (Sheppard, 1990, 56).

It was Bervard S. Childs who, in his excellent article „The Sensus Literalis of Scripture: An Ancient and Modern Problem" (1976) has convincingly demonstrated that the historical-critical method, emerging in the 18th century was characterized by a total commitment to the literal sense. The general assumption has been that there is an unbroken line of continuity between the Reformation and the 18th century with regard to the literal sense. However, Hans Frei, in his brilliant *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative* (1974), has demonstrated the discontinuity between the Reformers and the eighteenth and nineteenth century critics (Frei, 1974). Childs comments:

> Basic to the new approach was the attack on the identity of the explicative sense and the historical reference of the text. When the coherence between th verbal sense of the text, that is the literal sense, and its real reference was shattered, a whole set of new hermeneutical options opened up for the interpreter. Thus Spinoza was at pains to demonstrate that the literal meaning of the text was to be sharply distinguished from the question of truth, and that the subject matter of the Old Testament was not events but the lessons which they

> convey. Increasingly both conservative and liberal scholars grew to assume that the meaning of the biblical text lay in its historical reference and the issue of historical factuality, usually couched apologetically in terms of „evidences", came to dominate English 18th century study of the Bible. The task of exegesis lay in working out the true historical reference since revelation no longer consisted in the words, but exclusively in the subject-matter to which the words referred. (Childs, 1976, 88–89).

This new attitude had an enormous impact on the *sensus literalis*. True, the Reformers often interchanged the *sensus literalis* and the *sensus historicus* but they did not claim that the *sensus historicus* is the original and „true" literal meaning. With the 18th century, however,

> The historical sense of the text was constructed as being the original meaning of the text... Therefore, the aim of the interpreter was to reconstruct the original occasion of the historical reference on the basis of which the truth of the biblical text could be determined. In sum, the *sensus literalis* had become *sensus originalis*. (Childs, 1976, 89).

The consequence of this recognition was the desperate attempt to remove all the interpretative layers of Scripture, to free it from tradition and dogma in order to arrive at the original, authentic meaning. By this attitude, argues Childs, the integrity of the literal sense was shattered and undetermined just the same way as it was undermined by the four senses in the Middle Ages. By identifying the literal sense with the historical sense, which is then interpreted within the model of meaning as ostensive reference, any claim for the integrity of the literal sense of the text is virtually destroyed. The explanation of the biblical text is now governed by historical research. The role of the literal sense of the text functions to provide a way behind the text to some historical reality. The literal sense of the text in itself has lost all significance. (Childs, 1976, 90).

The further consequences of this unhappy distortion were that interpretation became speculative and the Bible, by losing its „scope", also lost its concept as Scripture of a community of faith. And last, the gap between the historical „then" and the relevant „now" became insurmountable. Hence there have been so many desperate attempts at Vergegenvärtigung in recent theology. Childs' frightening recognition is, that each consequence had its antecedent in the Middle Ages.

> What was intended as an attempt to free the text from the allegedly heavy hand of tradition and dogma proved to be a weapon which cut both ways... Whereas during the medieval period the crucial issue lay in the usage made of the multiple layers of meaning, above the text, the issue now turns on the multiple layers below the text. The parallel consists in the threat from both directions to undetermine the literal sense of the biblical text. (Childs, 1976, 92).

In conclusion, we can say that there are at least two characteristic features or concommitants of the modern distortion of the integrity of the literal sense. The first one is the endless attempt at the reconstruction of the original meaning and the second one is the effort to locate the literal meaning within the intention of the author. So far I have dealt only with the first feature. With regard to the intention of the author we can appeal to Ricoeur's theory of the text. The essence of Ricoeur's new theory of interpretation is that the text itself has intention: the text speaks, the text orients our thought. Interpretation is not an act on the text but the act of the text. (Ricoeur, 1986, 241). Therefore it is more proper to speak about „textual intention" rather than „authorial intention".

III. The Recovery o the Integrity of the Literal Sense

How to recover the loss of the integrity of the literal sense? In the following pages I wish to refer to some models of solutions. Some models are closely related to each other but some others do not seem to be aware of each other.

The first model is that of Childs himself. He offers the canon-critical recovery of the literal sense. He argues that biblical exegesis has been the strongest when it rested on the literal sense „ in such a way as not to divorce text from reality, and history from theology" (Childs, 1977,92). This implies that, a) the doctrine of revelation cannot be studied independendent from the doctrine of inspiration; b) the genuine *sensus literalis* means always a commitment to the canon; c) the literal sense and the figurative sense should not be in tension with one another, since the basis of the actualization and future accomodation is the literal sense. Thus the church's regula fidei should encompass both text and tradition in an integral unity as the living Word of God; d) the proper understanding should be of the *testimonium Spiritus sancti.* (Childs, 1976,92-3).

The second model is that of Gerald T. Sheppard who, following Childs, condemns the „misplaced literalism" of the conservatives and the moderns and indentifies the literal sense „by its canonical context, its intertext, and its subject matter which corresponds to the scope and analogy of faith..." (Sheppard, 1991,50). Sheppard says that beside the innaccurate assumption that a historical reconstruction of a biblical

author's intent is the same as the literal sense, the use of „scope" was neglected because of an „inadequate historical-critical appreciation for the semantic transformation that takes place when precritical traditions conjoin to form parts of a scripture in Judaism and Christianity". (Sheppard, 1989,LXVIII). Moreover, „the modern pursuit of a historically reconstructed author and his or her intent inevitably atomizes the biblical books by shifting focus away from what was traditionally considered the literal sense of Scripture...(Sheppard, 1989,LXIX). The solution for Sheppard is a reaffirming of the „scope" and a conscious awareness of the intertextuality of Scripture: „The nature of Scripture presupposes a textual unity or an intertextuality not anticipated by the original authors of traditions caught up in it". (Sheppard, 1989,LXX). The idea of the „scope" as a text-oriented concept strongly resembles what canonical criticism describes as „the shape or the composition of biblical books in their canonical context or canon-conscious redactions within the formation of Scripture". (Sheppard, 1989,LXXII).Using Frei's and Auberach's insights, Sheppard offers Perkins' idea of the scope of Scripture, which, as an intertext is a far more powerful and better way of rendering reality for religious believers than any other modern concept of history.

The third solution comes from the early Raymond Brown and his idea of the *sensus plenior* of Scripture. I am suggesting the „early" Raymond Brown, because with his gradual abandoning of a somewhat rigid scholastic tradition, he seems to have moved, in my view too rapidly, towards the historical idea of the literal sense. Thus as Childs' put it, Brown „has not...fully avoided the pitfalls of modern Protestantism". (Childs, 1977,90). However, I find that some of his ideas, perhaps with some modification, closely resemble the idea of the „scope" of Scripture.

The *sensus plenior* (hereafter: *SP*) is a modern term. It was invented by Ferdinandez in 1925 but gained wider currency after the papal encyclical of 1943 encouraged Catholic theologians to adopt methods of critical and historical exegesis in the study of the Bible. Raymond E.Brown proposed the following definition in 1955

> the sensus plenior is that additional, deeper meaning, intended by God but not clearly intended by the human author, which is seen to exist in the words of the biblical texts (or a group of texts, or even a whole book) when they are studied in the light of further revelation or development in the understanding of revelation. (Brown, 1955,92).

In 1968 Brown emphasized that the SP is not a new sense but belongs to the literal sense; it is the approfondissement of the literal sense. (Brown, 1968,72). It is a necessary consequence of the traditional doctrine of inspiration and the so-called „double-authorship" (human and divine) of Scripture. Thus Isaiah as the human author was not necessarily aware that he was uttering prophecy about the birth of Christ: the

fuller or deeper meaning of the passage is uncovered in a later stage of revelation and Matthew has recorded this discovery. The fuller sense of Scripture is the literal sense that is pregnant with a future. The prophet does not simply „foresee" the future; for him all futurity is within the „thing", but this is understood only later on the basis of the progressive revelation of God. SP is usually recognized in retrospect: just as in Jesus' lifetime the disciples were unable to understand some of their master's sayings (for example about the temple) or his actions (for example the footwashing) Jesus promised to send them the Paraclete who would enable them to understand these sayings and events.

Although the SP had only a short-lived career in Catholic exegesis, among some Protestants it soon gained currency. As early as 1965 J. M. Robinson suggested that the SP should take the direction of the New Hermeneutics (Gadamer, Ebeling etc.) which rejects the idea of „authorial intention" and conceives the text and its life from its original composition up till now as a „word-event". It would imply that it is not the „author" but the „language" that speaks in text. (Robinson, 1965,6-27). The term was creatively adopted by an American Protestant biblical scholar, William Sanford LaSor. He suggested the following definition of the SP:

> the fuller meaning of a passage, the 'something more' that was given by God in the divine inspiration, that makes the message equally valid as the word of God to succeeding generations. (LaSor,1978a,50)

LaSor related the SP to the „prophecy and fulfilment pattern". He rejected the idea that prophecy is a mere prediction of future events, claiming instead, that it is the „revelation of God's purpose in the present situation and its on-going character...It is an age-long outworking of his own will". (LaSor, 1978a,55). The idea of prophecy is that God is fulfilling his purpose which is not yet complete. Prophecy that „reveals some part of God's redemptive purpose is capable of being filled, or achieving a fullness, so that when it is filled full it is fulfilled". (LaSor, 1978,51). The SP or the fullness of meaning can be discovered when we „relate the situation and the prophecy to the on-going redemptive purpose of God". (LaSor, 1978a,51). I wish to demonstrate that Brown's and LaSor's ideas of the SP can be integrated into the „canonical approach" of Childs or Sheppard. A recent attempt at this integration was made by Douglas A. Oss. In 1988 he wrote as follows:

> the SP of a given text is simply that which emerges when the text is subjected to the light of all biblical revelation. Thus the use as a hermeneutical method does not involve allegorization or eisegeis, but involves discerning in a text all the strata of meaning that the canonical context warrants. The progress of revelation dictates that the meaning

> of scriptural text became deeper and clearer as the canon unfolded. The exegete, by considering the Bible as an integrated whole, reaches a fuller understanding of individual texts of Scripture. That fuller understanding involves strata of meaning, all of which the author expressed, whether or not he intended to express them. (OSS, 1988,105).

The fourth solution is offered by the literary criticism of Northrop Frye. We have already alluded to Frye's notion of the literal sense when we criticized the anti-intellectual „populist" literalism in Christianity. But Frye writes in *The Great Code* that „one of the central issues of the present book [is] the nature of 'literal' meaning". (Frye, 1982,45). This literal meaning is warranted by the „shape" of the Bible when read it as a unity of narrative and imagery. However, this unity is realized only in reading. Only in reading do we experience meaning. To describe the effect of reading on meaning Frye has adopted Dante's term „polysemous". This expression does not imply many different meanings nor does it contradict the primacy of the literal meaning. The Reformers' and Milton's formula that „no passage is to be interpreted in more than one sense" remains unchallenged. Frye describes what he means by this term as follows:

> One of the commonest experiences in reading is the sense of further discoveries to be made within the same structure of words. The feeling is approximately 'there is more to be got out of this', or we may say...that every time we read it we get something new out of it. This 'something new' is not necessarily something we have overlooked before, but may come rather from a new context in our experience... (Frye, 1982,220)

Commenting on Dante's four senses Frye writes:

> What is implied here is a single process growing in subtlety and comprehensiveness, not different senses, but different intensities or wider contexts of a continuous sense, unfolding like a plant out of a seed. (Frye, 1982,221).

With this idea of polysemous meaning Frye, like Childs, is able to preserve the integrity of the literal sense („not different senses") and he is also able to avoid the trap of historicists or intentionalists who want to fix the meaning in an external, historical or biographical reality. There have been some other technical terms that, like Frye's „polysemus", that have tried to provide room for his „continuous sense". The

Antiochian's *theoria* or Brown"s *sensus plenior* strike me as similar to Frye's notion. What is common to all these theories is that meaning is not conceived as something static or fixed but rather as a continuous, unfolding process, „unfolding like a plant out of a seed". If we conceive of the language of the Bible in terms of a „seed", then meaning should also be understood as an organic growth.

Therefore, our conclusion is, that the literal meaning is a dynamic process rather than a static entity; it is in constant motion, it is a progress, a growth, always in the making. The *sensus plenior* should be seen as part of the literal sense, a future, figurative dimension of the literal meaning. Thus we have come back to where we began, since the meaning of peshat was „to spread out", „to stretch out", „to make plain", „to extend", „to unfold"„straightening and smoothing out the uneven parts". (Weingreen, 1976, 57; Gertner, 1962,180). Contrary to traditional view of authorial intention the literal sense is not the property of the author but the quality of the text, and belongs to the reader.

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APPLICATIONS

GERDA ELATA-ALSTER AND RACHEL SALMON

Interpretations of Beginning: Narration and Doctrine

The Book of Genesis opens with an account of how G-d's words created all things:

> In the beginning G-d created the heaven and the earth. Now the earth was unformed and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of G-d hovered over the face of the waters. And G-d said: „Let there be light." and there was light.[1]

Although the first chapter of Genesis goes on to recount how the inanimate and animate elements of the universe were created, we are never told how language – both the instrument of creation and the medium through which creation is narrated – came about. This narrative gap, nevertheless, turns out to be very core around which both the Jewish and the Christian traditions have organized their ideas about the nature and function of G-d's creative language.

John's insertion of the „Word" into his re-writing of the creation story establishes the Christian doctrine that everything which was created was created by the Divine Word, and that the Divine Word was G-d.

> In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with G-d, and the Word was G-d. He was in the beginning with G-d; all things were made through him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. (John 1:1-4)[2]

In his paraphrase of John 1:3, Thomas Aquinas spells out John's reasoning and conclusion:

> If everything was indeed made by the Word, the Word itself cannot be said to have been made. To have been made, the Word would have had to have been made by some other Word, because everything was made by the Word. Therefore there must be another Word by which this Word, about which the author of the Gospel speaks, was made ... this Word we designate as the First-Born G-d, by which everything was made, since it is neither made, nor a created thing, and if it is not a created thing it is necessary to say that it is cosubstantial with the

[1] The translation of Hebrew materials are our adaptations of current Jewish editions of the texts.

[2] Revised Standard Version.

Father, because every substance other than the Divine Essence is created.[3]

Aquina's conclusion would solve the problem of why we are not told how G-d created language; it was not, in fact, created. Attempting to work out the relationship between G-d the Father and the Word, Aquinas adopts the Augustinian distinction between man's inner and outer word. For man, the word which he actually speaks (his outer word) and the word which he thinks (his inner word) can never fully correspond. In G-d these words do correspond, making Father and Son one.

Drawing out of Genesis a Christian idea of what actually was „in the beginning", John thus transforms narration into theology. For the active verb phrase in Genesis: „G-d created the heavens and the earth", John substitutes a string of nominal phrases. These transform the Genesis account of creation, as an act performed by G-d's speech into a doctrinal declaration about the essence of divinity. Distinction and differentiation, which characterize both the process of creation and the language by means of which it is narrated in the Genesis account, are replaced, in John, by the almost total collapse of same into same produced by the rhythmic repetition of the copula. The only direct allusion to creation occurs in the past tense, and refers to a completed universe which somehow „came into being" through the Logos. Indeed, the Greek medium verb form *egeneto* does not necessitate a maker; without any narration of creative action, we move from the Logos to a fully created world.

John's sentences inaugurate a long tradition of systematic theology, which tries to read the spiritual meaning out of the narrative material. Although Christianity accepts the divine authorship of the Hebrew Bible, the written words, in themselves, cannot convey sufficient knowledge to man. Biblical narration is merely the letter which is like a shadow veiling full insight.[4] Only the experience of – and later, faith in – the incarnation of the Word gives access to the „spirit" behind the „letter". Knowledge may thus be said to precede language; a truth inspired by faith can then be identified in the written word. John can read the spiritual import out of the creation story only because

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[3] Thomas von Aquin, Der Prolog des Johannes-Evangeliums: Super Evangelium S. Joannis Lectura (Caput 1. Lectio I-XI). Übersetzung, Einführung und Erlaeuterungen von Wolf-Ulrich Klüner (Stuttgart: Verlag Freies Geistesleben, 1986).

[4] For discussions of this point, see especially: Jean Danielou, From Shadows to reality: Studies in the Biblical Typology of the Fathers, trans. Wulstan Hibbard, (London, 1960); G. W. H. Lampe and K. J. Woollcombe, „Essays on Typology, in Studies in Biblical Theology, No. 22, (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson Inc., 1957), esp. pp. 18-22; J. S. Preus, From Shadow to Promise: Old Testament Interpretation from Augustine to the Young Luther, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1969); Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages, (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), esp. pp. 3-27; Harry Austryn Wolfson, The Philosophy of the Church Fathers, Volume I, (Cambridge: The University Press, 1964), esp. pp. 60-67.

he already knows it. The doctrine of the incarnation, which makes reading possible, is, in its turn, read by John out of the Genesis text.

Were it possible for the essence of divinity to be completely communicated, language would have become transparent, allowing spirit to present itself without the interference of a word barrier. A completely adequate doctrinal metalanguage would make narration superfluous, We know that this goal has not been attained because Christian doctrine is still being refined in human language. Augustine and Aquinas explain this as the result of the gap between the inner (essential, fully adequate) word of man and the outer (material, of the flesh) word, which is always striving to coincide with it.[5] What is important, for our purpose, is the circular view of the relationship between knowledge and language which the doctrine of incarnation implies and empowers.

The way that the Midrash relates to language can also be said to be circular – but in a different way. For the Rabbis, there is nothing available to man above or behind the words of the Torah – those divine words which were revealed to man in (or, in another midrashic version, „as in") human language.[6] Man can know about G-d only what he can learn through the words of the Torah, which are themselves G-d's creatures. In the Jewish tradition, the words of the Torah are as „inner" as one can ever get; it is unimaginable that human theological or doctrinal statements could take their place. The epistemological gap, which in Christianity is represented as the difference between man's inner and outer word, is represented in the rabbinic tradition as the difference between the Written and the Oral Torah. Although the words of the Written Torah, as revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai are completely adequate, they must be read by man, who actualizes the Oral Torah. However, this, too, as we shall see, is a circular process; it is the Oral Torah which tells us that the Oral Torah (as well the Written Torah) was revealed on Sinai.[7]

The Oral Torah is a narration about the biblical narration. The Sages of the Midrash do not explicitly formulate theological questions, such as where the language of creation came from, nor do they give doctrinal formulations to the solutions implicit in their narrations. John's reading of the opening of Genesis, however, may invite us to read an enigmatic Midrash on the first verse of Genesis as implicitly questioning the nature of the language which G-d used in creating the world. We quote the version recorded in Genesis Rabba 1:4:

> Six things preceded the creation of the world; some of them were created and some of them arose in G-d's mind to be created. The

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[5] Augustine, Confessions, XI:7 and Thomas Aquinas, Summa of Theology, I, q/34, a. 2, ad. 1.

[6] Sifre Bamidbar, section 112; B. Sanhedrin, 64b; Y. Shabbat, 19:2; and B. Gittin, 41b.

[7] Sayings of the Fathers, I:1.

> Torah and the Throne of Glory were created. From whence [do we know that the Torah was actually created before the creation of the world]? It is written (Proverbs 8, 22): „G-d made me as the beginning of His way."

This Midrash seems to meditate upon those categories of existents which cannot be derived, even allegorically, from the things created during the six days of creation. It can thus be read as addressing, among other subjects, the problem of where the language through which G-d created the world came from. The Torah itself does not tell us this. Logically, there are two possibilities: either G-d's words are G-d Himself (which is what John says), or those words must have been, themselves, created by G-d. The Rabbis clearly chose the latter; the Torah, which both is the language through which the world was created, and is the language which records the process of creation, was itself created by G-d before He created the world. This Midrash thus defamiliarizes the Genesis story, by showing us the prospective face of the retrospective account of how G-d created the world.

The Rabbis leave us more puzzled than we began; they make a story which seemed straightforward turn back upon itself. The Torah seems to cite the speech acts through which G-d created the world (such as: „Let there be light"), but if the Torah preceded creation, then the speech acts which it reports had not yet been spoken. Although they have the form of cited speech acts, they violate the logic of chronology. Indeed, as we shall see, another Midrash declares that G-d looked in the Torah and created the world, which would project a sequence in which G-d reads his spoken words before speaking them. Thus the Genesis pericope, which became in John's reading theological knowledge, is retold by the Rabbis as an impossible narrative. John's circle moves from seeking what he already knows to finding what he already knew. The midrashic assertion that the Torah was created before the creation of the world introduces the possibility that the chronological relationship between event and narration, between the Torah and what it is about, may be reversed.

We can, perhaps, make the specificity of Midrash clearest by indicating what its Sages would have done with an opportunity provided by John's text. The Greek for „with" in the phrase: „the Word was with G-d, and the Word was G-d"(1.1) is pros rather than the normative para. Christian theologians, coming upon this linguistic difficulty, have been at pains not only to figure out exactly what shade of meaning it implies, but also what its doctrinal implications might be. For example, the explanation that pros gives the nuance of direction: „having regard to G-d", or „looking toward G-d" is, in one instance, taken to indicate the „continuous timeless existence" of the Logos.[8]

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[8] ICC, ad. loc.

John's rewriting of Genesis exemplifies the procedure of substituting a metaphysical, perhaps even metalinguistic, formulation for the „letter" of narration. A recent scholar (Peder Borgen) spells this out: „The question then arises: Do some of the words and phrases in the expansion [that is, in John's rewriting] replace and interpret words and phrases in Gen 1:1 ff? The answer is in the affirmative.[9] Not the words themselves, but the spiritual meanings which can be read through them are essential. Doctrine, which is thought of as somehow comparatively free of the contingencies of narrative language, relatively close to the inner word, can be substituted for the inadequate language (outer word) of the text.

Confronted with such a linguistic problem, the Rabbis would proceed quite differently. Without explicitly pointing out the difficulty (without, that is, introducing any metalanguage), they would cite additional Bible verses and midrashic materials which expand the context within which the difficulty can be discussed. However, no attempt would be made to give an exhaustive and exclusive explication. Instead of formulating doctrines, the Midrash generates more and more narrations which run alongside the text that it is reading. The Oral Torah can go on reading the Written Torah forever, but it can never replace a word of it. It is the letter which is irreplaceable; by staying in place it generates a multitude of readings.

Yet it would be naive to suppose that the Rabbis simply stumble upon an obstacle in the text, and then go about proposing as many solutions as they can devise. The Oral Torah, as we have already mentioned – that is, the whole body of rabbinical readings – is circular, because it grounds itself in a tradition that was always already embodied in language. The Rabbis tell us that: „whatever a future disciple will innovate was already revealed to Moses on Mount Sinai".[10] A diachronic line of disciples who make innovations in each generation is thus established, alongside the synchronicity of an Oral Tradition which was somehow always available. When the Sages of the Midrashh tease out the possibilities of a biblical word or phrase, they see themselves as simultaneously making a new reading and handing on a tradition. As students of the Midrash we can, therefore, never know for certain whether a verse cited as a prooftext (or some sort of lighter support) for an interpretation is a serious attempt to make an innovative argument, or the bringing forward of an association that was already in place. What we do know is that no new words erase or replace older ones; there is no

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[9] Borgen, Peder, Philo, John, and Paul: New Perspectives on Judaism and Early Christianity, (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1987), p. 152.

[10] B. Menahot, 29b

privileged language; every word of the Written Torah and the Oral Torah may become the subject of interpretation, or may be called forth to interpret other words.[11]

In order to compare a midrashic reading of Gen 1 with that of John, we shall first turn to Rashi, the medieval Jewish commentator, who spells out some of the difficulties in the biblical verse. The difficulty addressed here by Rashi is grammatical. The first word of Genesis - בראשית be-reshit - has usually been translated into English as: „In the beginning". This translation does not, in fact, properly render the Hebrew grammar. Be-reshit can be read either as a construct form which lacks its complement („In the beginning of ..."), or as an indefinite prepositional phrase („In a beginning"), or, by taking the letter bet (ב) as an instrumentalis („By means of reshit").

Rashi suggests two possible literal readings, each requiring a certain textual manipulation.[12] The first consists in changing the vocalization of the verb ברא, from the past tense bara to the infinitive bero, which would make it possible to read Genesis 1:1-2 as subordinated to Genesis 3, namely: „In the beginning of G-d's creating the heavens and the earth...G-d said: 'Let there be light'". It would thus turn out that light was created first, and not „the heavens and the earth", as otherwise might appear.

Rashi then goes on to suggest another literal possibility. The first verse of Genesis could be cad as an elliptic sentence. One could read be-reshit bara as: „In the beginning of", supplying a complement, such as : „time " or „everything". Rashi supports this possibility by citing other biblical verses which traditionally have been supplemented in this way.[13] However, Rashi, like most of his followers, does not accord his peshat reading exclusivity. He regularly juxtaposes literal readinsg, which seem to follow rules of explication familiar to modern Western readers, with Midrashim which proceed in unfamiliar ways.

Characteristically, the midrashic readings of the first word of Genesis, בראשית (be-reshit), do not explicitly state their interpretive problem; readers must themselves supply the logical and linguistic difficulties from which the Midrashim could have evolved. The opening Midrash of Genesis Rabba has the generic form of a petichta

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[11] For scholarly discussions of midrashic produceres, see especially: David Weiss HaLivni, Midrash, Misnah and Gemara: The Jewish Predilection for Justified Law. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986); Issac Heinemann, The Methods of the Aggadah (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1970); and Joseph Heinemann, Aggadah and its Development: Studies in the Continuity of a Tradition (Hebrew), (Jerusalem: Keter, 1974). For a collection of recent studies of the Midrash in English, see: Geoffrey H. Hartman and Sanford Budick, Midrash and Literature, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

[12] Although the Rabbis never emend the written text of the Torah, they often read the written word in a changed form for the purposes of interpretation.

[13] Rashi 'on Gen 1:1) writes: „and there are passages in the Torah which are written in abbreviated form and are lacking a word, such as: 'Because it did not block my mother's womb,' without explictly indicating the reference of 'it' (Job 3:10).

(„opening"), which means that it first cites the verse it is going to comment upon – „In the beginning G-d created" – and immediately presents a Sage who cites another Bible verse – „Then I was by Him, as an amon; And I was daily all delight" (Prov. 8:30). Without stating the relationship between the verse from Proverbs and the original verse from Genesis, the Midrash goes on to list possible meanings for the term amon, and then cites a biblical verse for each of these meanings.

> „In the beginning G-d created" (Gen 1:1), Rabbi Oshaya opened: „'Then I was by Him, as an amon (אמון); And I was daily all delight' (Pro 8:30).Amon [means] paedagogue, amon [means] covered, amon [means] hidden, and there are those who say amon [means] great. Amon [means] paedagogue, as it is said: 'as a nursing-father [אומן -o-men] carrieth the sucking child' (Nu 11:12), amon [means] covered, as it says: 'They that were brought up (or covered) [אמונים emunim, plural of amun] in scarlet' (La 4:5), amon [means] hidden, as it says: 'And he brought up (or hid) אומן -omen Hadassah' (Esther 2:7), amon [means] great, as it says: 'Art thou better (or: greater) than No-amon (Na 3:8) and the Targum (Aramaic translation) [of this verse] is: 'Art thou better than Alexandria, the great, which dwells between the rivers'. Another interpretation (דבר אחר, literally, another thing or speech). Amon [means] uman. The Torah says: I was the instrument (כלי אומנותו -klee umanuto) of The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He. As is customary in the world, when a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, he does not build it by means of his own wits, but by the wits of an craftsman (uman). And the craftsman does not build it by his own wits, but he has parchment and tablets in order to know where to put the rooms and where to put the openings. Thus The-Holy-One--Blessed-Be-He looked at the Torah and created the world. And the Torah said: „Be- („By means of", rather than „in") reshit („a beginning") G-d created. And „beginning" is no other than Torah, as it is written: „The Lord made me as the beginning of His way" (Prov. 8:22).

It is difficult to describe exactly what the Midrash is doing here. A theologically oriented reader would be concerned with questions about the nature of creation; the Midrash simply juxtaposes two non-contiguous verses, without even telling us what element of the first verse is being illuminated by the discussion of the word amon, in the second verse. A philologically oriented reader, trying to figure out the meaning of an obscure word, would assemble all of the other occurrences of the word (or its root) in the Bible and other related sources, in the hope of establishing a normative reading. Although the Midrash does cite various verses containing the root אמ"ן its list turns out to be by no

means exhaustive. In addition, the Midrash appears to strain the verses which it cites by either reading a non-normative meaning out of the root am"n, or else by reading a derivate from the root in a way that does not fit the context.

Modern readers, unfamiliar with the synchronic dimension of the Oral Torah, would be hard put to rationalize the way that the Midrash goes about its work. A detailed analysis of cross-references would show these „odd" midrashic readings to be traditional ones; the Midrash cites precisely those verses containing the root am"n which have always been associated, in one way or another, with the first verse of Genesis. This synchronicity makes it impossible for us confidently to decide whether the Midrash is deriving or attributing the meanings which it gives to am"n. Furthermore, the awareness of readers versed in the midrashic tradition that the voice of Wisdom speaking in Proverbs 8 has traditionally been taken to refer to the Torah, would enrich their contextual orientation, and enable them to pick up a variety of allusions.

Although, as we have mentioned, the Midrash does not tell us what the verse from Proverbs is supposed to clarify in the Genesis verse, we can learn something from straightforward reasoning, even if we lack the benefit of traditional learning. A process of elimination suggests that the word amon, in the second verse, upon which the entire Midrash focuses, is supposed to illuminate the word be-reshit. Surely, as a noun, it could not refer to bara, which is a verb. The only other word avaiable is „G-d". Since the verse in Proverbs states that the amon „was with G-d", we can expect that the Rabbis would avoid any hint of a dual creator or a multiple-personed G-d.[14]

If we then take amon as somehow synonymous with „reshit" (usually translated „beginning"), we find that the alternatives which the Midrash presents (Pedagogue, covered, hidden and great) produce the strange readings: „In a pedagogue G-d created", „In a hidden [thing] G-d created", etc. The awkwardness of these possibilities suggests a re-reading of the Hebrew preposition be, which we have so far taken (and which is universally translated) as „in". Instead, it could be read as an instrumental preposition: „through", „by means of", „with" (in the sense of agency, not accompaniment). The first verse of Genesis would then read: „By means of an amon G-d created the heavens and the earth. All danger of heresy is thus avoided, but we still do not know what an amon is.

Leaving in place the various meanings of amon – none of them immediately illuminating – which it has suggested so far, the Midrash goes on to „another interpretation" which is more fully elaborated. This time, the Midrash puts forth uman

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[14] Indeed, we find that many Christian interpretations use this verse of proverbs in the elaboration of the Logos concept. To quote the latest edition of the Catholic Study Bible: „Here that plurality of divine Persons is foreshadowed which was afterward to be fully revealed when Wisdom in the Person of Jesus Christ became incarnate".

(craftsman), as the last possible transformation of the letters of amon. The Midrash, surprisingly, then rewrites uman (craftsman) as umanut (craft), making the Torah say: „I was the instrument of the craft (umanuto) of The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He", instead of the anticipated: „I was with Him as a craftsman". Here, too, we may note the Midrash's concern to steer clear of any implication that the creation came about by means of an additional divine person.

This time, the Midrash does not cite Bible verses in support of reading amon as having to do with „craft", but it brings a parable. The conventional analogy between the acts of G-d and those of a king of flesh and blood arouses an expectation of correspondence. Indeed, there does at first appear to be a relevant similarity: just as the architect looks into the sketches and plans (which he himself has made), so G-d looks into the Torah (which He has made). But, the closer we look, the more problematic the analogy becomes.

The „craftsman" (uman), who had been transformed into „the instrument of craft" (klee umanuto) by the quoted words of the Torah, reappears in the parable as the assistant of the king, the one who puts the „instrument of craft" to use. Thus the question arises why the Midrash substituted „instrument of craft" for „craftsman" in the first place. We have assumed that „craftsman" uman had to be eliminated because it was the only transformation of amon which could suggest a creative persona in addition to G-d. Why then does the Midrash bring it back in the parable – „As is customary in the world, when a king of flesh and blood builds a palace, he does not build it by means of his own wits, but by means of the wits of a craftsman uman" – and in such an odd way? Indeed, to „build it by means of His own wits" is exactly what we would expect of G-d, who is not „a king of flesh and blood".

If there were only G-d reading the parchment and the tablets, the parable would fit the Torah's statement: „I was the instrument of the craft (umanuto) of The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He". Alternatively, had the parable presented only a craftsman and his plans, it could have been read as an account of G-d, as a craftsman, creating the world by means of the Torah. In either case, we might suppose that we have learned from the Midrash about how G-d created the world: through the instrument of the Torah, which He Himself had created. On the one hand, such a statement would certainly make sense. On the other hand, the Midrash goes on to destabilize its own assertion, by introducing a confusion between agent and instrument.

Since there are three terms in the parable – a king, a craftsman, and the plans – there seems to be an extra element. This impression results from our assumption that when the Midrash presents the Torah as calling itself „the instrument" of G-d's craft, it is substituting „instrument of craft" (klee umanuto) for „craftsman" (uman). Such a substitution should obviate the earlier term „craftsman". The personification, which had been brought to an abrupt halt by the authoritative speaking voice of the Torah calling

itself an „instrument", inexplicably returns in the parable. It thus appears that the Midrash introduces a serious difficulty where it could have produced a smooth analogy.

As we begin to wonder whether the Midrash is not reinstating what it previously erased, we may ask what purpose the difficulty might serve, or, perhaps better, what effect the element of misfit in the analogy has upon the reader of the Midrash. We find ourselves returning to the first part of the Midrash – where the other readings of amon are set out – in order to see whether the contexts brought into play can provide any useful clues for the interpretation of the parable.

As we recall, the Midrash brings a verse for each synonym that it proposes; it begins by reading „by means of a pedagogue" out of Numbers 11:12. Moses here complains to G-d for putting upon him the impossible task of guiding the People of Israel. In a standard translation we find:

> Wherefore hast Thou dealt ill with Thy servant? and wherefore have I not found favour in Thy sight that Thou layest the burden of all this people upon me? Have I conceived all this people? Have I brought them forth, that Thou shouldest say unto me: Carry them in thy bosom, as a nursing-father (omen) carrieth the sucking child, unto the land with Thou didst swear unto their fathers.

Explaining omen as „pedagogue" rather than as „nursing father" the Midrash alludes, by adopting the Greek term, not only to the educational authority of the omen, but also to his subordinate position. In the context of Moses's complaint, the word „pedagogue" implies both his responsibility towards the People of Israel, and his servitude towards G-d. He is thus trapped in an untenable position when Israel sins. As has been noted by scholars of the Midrash, to represent the role of the Torah in the process of creation in such a way guards against the unacceptable notion of a primordial creative force co-extensive with G-d.

We may also read out of this context an attempt to grapple with the problem of imperfection in the world. Although the Torah has been created by G-d, like Moses, it can be held responsible, because it has taken on the task of G-d's emissary.

The Midrash goes on to read another variant of the root am"n in Lamentations 4:5 as „covered". This verse describes the impact of Jerusalem's destruction on the city and its population.

> They that did feed on dainties
> Are desolate in the streets;
> They that were brought up (ha-emunim) in scarlet
> Embrace dunghills.

The term ha-emunim is usually translated as „brought up". The reading „covered" provides an image of the Torah, which is traditionally wrapped in rich scarlet cloth. However, the meaning „brought up", continues to hover, here, both because it seems natural, and because it is connected to the other contexts evoked. The pedagogue

just mentioned is one who educates or brings up a child, and the amon in the next verse (Esther 2:7), which the Midrash reads as „hidden", is also usually translated „brought up".

> And he brought up (omen) Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter; for she had neither father nor mother, and the maiden was of beautiful form and fair to look on; and when her father and mother were dead, Mordecai took her for his own daughter.

Unlike the omen in Numbers 11:12 – which refers to Moses and which the Midrash reads as the noun „pedagogue" – it reads omen in the Book of Esther as the present participle of the verb „to hide". The Midrash learns this meaning from the juxtaposition of omen with the name Esther, which contains the root „to hide". The Torah can then be said not only to be richly robed by G–d – which would hide its nakedness while allowing it to be seen (covered) – but it can also be said to be hidden by G–d.

The Midrash next reads the meaning great for amon as it appears in the name No-amon (Thebes in Upper Egypt) in Nahum: 3:8–10, where the prophet chastizes Jerusalem:

> Art thou better than No-amon
> That was situated among the rivers ...
> Yet she was carried away,
> She went into captivity;

Like in Lamentations, where the sign of nobility (scarlet clothing) was lost through sin, the greatness of a city also proves perishable, if G–d so wills. This context can be seen as implying that the power of the Torah is derivative from the power of G–d, and the Torah did not create the world as an independent agent.

There is, indeed, another traditional midrashic narrative which tells us that when the Torah was created by G–d before He created the world, it was „daily all delight" for Him.[15] It was then both covered and hidden by its Pedagogue (G–d), until it grew up (became great) and was revealed. At this point it became „daily all delight" to the People of Israel. We note that in this midrashic narrative G–d rather than the Torah plays the role of pedagogue, but once G–d creates the world by means of the Torah, the Torah, itself, becomes the pedagogue of the created world.

The interplay of these meanings brings us back to the „another interpretation", with a question. Are we to relate to this interpretation as one which is simply to be added to the others, or is it brought to replace them, because they proved insufficient or unsatifactory? The confusion between agent and instrument which lies just below the surface of the readings in the first half of the Midrash, comes forward in the „another

[15] Genesis Rabba 1:1.

interpretation". When an analogy between the Torah and a craftsman or artisan is drawn, the heretic possibility of viewing the Torah as an independent creator becomes explicit. The Midrash does not put this danger into words (which would involve dangers of its own), but it immediately reads into uman (craftsman) the meaning klee umanuto (instrument of His craft).

Perhaps the reader is being invited to rethink the relationship between a craftsman and his tools. There is a later commentary which suggest that we are to understand that the Torah as an „instrument of craft" is not like a carpenter's hammer. The carpenter's tool was most likely produced by a separate craftsman, whereas The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He, Himself, created the Torah with which He created the world. Unlike an inanimate instrument, which can be disposed of as soon as the work is accomplished, the Torah is said (in other Midrashim) to act as an agent in the ongoing creative act of sustaining the world.[16]

The conventional distinctions between instrument and agent are further modified when we recall the tradition that G-d created the world with the letters of the alphabet. Indeed, in the Torah (Gen 1:3 passim), we read that G-d created through the very speech acts – such as: „Let there be light" – which are reported in the Torah. Thus the Torah, which is language, tells us that G-d created by means of language, and the Midrash represents the Torah as saying: with me-בְּ", whose name is „the first one-בְּרֵאשִׁית", G-d created the heavens and the earth". When our Midrash ends by citing: „The Lord made me as the beginning of His way" (Prov 8:22), a verse proximate to the one with which it began (Prov 8:30), and in which the Torah calls itself „beginning", it may be saying that we can know about the creation of the world only what we can learn by studying Torah. But without the help of the Oral Torah (the Midrash), we cannot understand even the first word of the Written Torah. Thus it may be that the confusion aroused by the parable which ends this Midrash is teleological: to make it impossible for the reader even to imagine that he now knows how G-d created the world.

There are other Midrashim on the first verse of Genesis which take up the issue of the limitations upon human knowledge, just as there are discussions in the halachic portions of the Talmud about whether it is permissible to study the divine acts of creation at all, and if so, how and by whom.[17] The second Midrash in Genesis Rabba, in fact, asks why the Torah tells the creation story, in the first place.

> Rabbi Yehosua of Sachnin in the name of Rabbi Levi opened: „He hath declared to his people the power of His works, / In giving them

[16] For further midrashic material on this subject, see especially: the commentary of the Maharaz Wolf on Genesis Rabba.

[17] See, for example, Mishnah, tractate Haggigah, 2:1.

> the heritage of the nations." (Ps 111:6) What is the reason that The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He revealed to Israel what was created on the first day and what was created on the second day? It is because of the idol-worshippers, so that they should not reproach Israel saying: You are a nation of robbers! [In such a case] Israel can reply: Isn't it rather that you are the robbers. Doesn't it say: „The Cretans that came forth out of Crete, destroyed them [the former inhabitants of the land], and dwelt in their stead". (Deut 2:23) But, in truth, the world and everything in it belongs to The-Holy-One-Blessed-Be-He. At his wish, He gave it to you, and at His wish, He took it from you and gave it to us; as it is written: „In giving them the heritage of the nations, He hath declared to his people the power of His works" (His acts of creation). „In the beginning" He told them the „In the beginning" (בראשית).

Rashi, here, quotes a probably later version of this Midrash, which opens with a rationale for the question asked in Genesis Rabba:

> „In the beginning": Rabbi Yitschak said: G-d should have begun the Torah only with: „This month shall be unto you the beginning of months" (Exod 12:2), which contains the first command (mitzvah) given to Israel. And what is the reason He opened with „In the beginning"? That was because: „He has declared to his people the power of his works, / In giving them the heritage of the nations." (Ps 11:6)

Ramban, a slightly later commentator, draws out the implications of Rashi's use of this midrashic passage. He asks whether Rashi could possibly have meant to say that there was no intrinsic value in telling the creation story. Ramban concludes that were it indeed possible to teach us how G-d created the world ex nihilo, then there would have been every reason for the Bible to open with an account of creation. Thus, Ramban understands Rashi's citing of the Midrash's question – as to why the Torah (as the Book of Law) did not begin with the first law in Exodus 12:2 – to imply that we cannot learn creatio ex nihilo from the words of the creation narrative. If the creation story is not telling us how G-d created the world, what, then, is it telling us? The answer that Ramban finds in the midrashic material is that it tells us that G-d's power over the world is absolute, and that He guides its history.

Thus, Ramban's reading of Rashi's reading of the Midrash's reading of the opening verse of Genesis does not return to the question of the literal meaning of the phrase be-reshit. Although Ramban reads it as referring somehow to the order of creation, he assumes that we cannot understand its reference in either spatial or temporal terms, but only in moral terms. By setting out what the first verse of Genesis

comes to teach us, the medieval commentators read the Midrash as placing limitations upon what we can learn from the Torah about the essence of G-d and His ways.

If we compare the Rabbis' reading of the biblical text with that of John, we get an inkling of the difference between a midrashic and a logocentric approach. Even the medieval Jewish commentators - who most likely were influenced, in some degree, by the logocentricity of the Western tradition - do not treat the language of the text as a veil thrown over the meaning. We do not find the Jewish exegetes attempting to lift up or pierce through the linguistic specificity of the text in order to find the meaning behind the words, or to reveal the essential in the accidental. On the contrary, the letters of the Torah are the closest that they can get to an understanding of the ways of G-d; what cannot be read in the letters is not to be read at all.

Section five of the first chapter of Genesis Rabba speaks directly against the hybris of those who presume to explicate the acts of creation which G-d has kept secret from His creatures. This Midrash, which also has the form of a petichta, opens with a reference to Psalm 31:19-20:

> Let the lying lips be dumb,
> Which speak arrogantly against the righteous
> (tsadeek),
> With pride and contempt.
>
> Oh how abundant is thy goodness, which Thou hast
> laid up (tsafun) for them that fear Thee;
> Which Thou hast wrought for them that take their
> refuge in Thee, in the sight of the sons of man!

Ostensibly, these are the words of King David, who begs G-d to silence his enemies. The Midrash, however, reads „the righteous" as referring to G-d. It can thus interpret these lines as a curse upon those who are liars by definition, because they presume to „speak" about that which G-d has hidden. In order to produce this reading, the Midrash reads tsafun as „hidden", rather than the more usual „laid up". The very things which John seeks to reveal are viewed, by the Jewish tradition, as that with which man must not tamper. The letters of the alphabet, in which the Torah is written, are not to be looked behind. The power in them is not to be reduced to theological formulation. The lips which attempt to do so are guilty of speaking „arrogantly ... with pride and contempt". For the Midrash, the only motive for speaking of „the work of creation" could be self-aggrandisement. Section ten of the first chapter of Genesis Rabba expresses this most succinctly:

> Rabbi Yona, in the name of Rabbi Levi, said: Why was the world created with a bet? Because the letter bet is closed on all sides and open in front. Thus you have no right to say what is below and what

is above, what is before and what is after. [You may only expound] from the day the world was created onwards.

GERALD T. SHEPPARD

The Role of „Wisdom" in the Interpretation of Scripture

In a preface to his published lectures of 1526 on Ecclesiastes, Martin Luther states a view of this book that may sound entirely foreign to modern biblical studies:

> It would, therefore, be more correct to call this Book of Ecclesiastes the *Politics* or the *Economics* of Solomon. He [its author] does not, indeed, legislate of prescribes laws for the governance of the state or the family. This is taken care of in great detail by the natural law or human reason, to which according to Gen. 1:28, earthly things have been subjected; this has been, is, and must remain the source, the criterion, and the end of all laws, whether political or domestic. But this book can give counsel to a man involved in the state or the household as he deals with difficult problems, and it can instruct and encourage his mind as he bears the troubles of such a position. Problems and troubles are endless here, as is evident both from all the histories in Holy Scripture and from the stories of all the poets.

Luther, next, illustrates these problems of life by appeal to everything from the labors of Hercules, to the monsters faced by Ulysses, to the biblical account of David's confrontation with Goliath. Certainly, he shows us, once again, that *sola scriptura* did not mean „only scripture" but that scripture was alone a sufficient and adequate source of saving faith. The poets and their depictions of reality still remain important to his theological argument. As did the Apostle Paul, Luther drew illustrations freely from the lives of classical poets and the protagonists in their stories, as easily as he recollected similar events in the biblical narratives.

Finally, Luther concludes, „what the wise man said is true, 'Government dispays the man.'" – again not a biblical proverb though still, for Luther, „true" – „But unless there is some Solomon to exhort and console him, government crushes the man, extinguishes him, and utterly destroys him."[1]

Luther espouses a remarkably positive role for Solomon's „wisdom" in Ecclesiastes and he distinguishes it carefully from other uses of „natural law or human reason" to develop „laws". While „natural law or human reason" are the wellspring of mundane and necessary laws for the governance of household, city, church, and nation, „biblical wisdom" plays a very different role with high consequences. Wisdom is

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[1] *Luther's Works, Volume 15, „Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Last Words of David, 2 Samuel 23:1–7," ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing, 1972), p. 5*

required in order to prevent the best governments established by human reason from „crushing", „extinguishing", and „utterly destroying" the very same reasonable human beings who make laws. Luther argues for this distinct role for wisdom by observing that the Solomonic books – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs – lack „laws" as found elsewhere in scripture, and, therefore, these books address a different sub-topic related to the application of temporal laws. Wisdom is necessary to protect even the best laws, at any given time in history, froom being destructive of the the very themes they share with wisdom – „righteousness, justice, and equity" (Prov 1:3b) they are necessarily designed to protect, defend, and perpetuate.

What „wisdom" has the power to do, distinguished from the necessary zeal of human reason or natural law to proscribe and to legislate, is to comprehend the real and „difficult problems", „the [actual and „endless"] troubles" of life. Moreover, this perception of life's troubles – including the inner-logic and concrete nature of human tragedy, suffering, prejudice, survival, and restortation – points to a realistic sub-structure beneath the superficial drama of our lives. Without Solomonic wisdom efforts at legislation tend to ignore the limitations of both human reason and perceptions of natural law. The legislation itself drifts into a dangerous idealization of itself and exerts the inhumane tyranny of all autonomous, bloodless abstractions. So, Solomonic wisdom, distinct from a particular set of laws or rules, secures the higher ground of „politics" and „economics". Wisdom, as such, represents a vital meta/legal form of discourse, without which any talk of preserving laws or morality will be potentially destructive of life itself.

This pre-modern view of Solomonic wisdom is not a distinctly Lutheran one. Luther simply expresses a position that had been current for centuries, here and there, in the history of interpretation: Joseph Hall (1574–1656) studied at Cambridge an gained renown for his English prose contributions of both a secular and a religious nature. He was one of many Reformed English protestants who „fell between the stools" politically. His defense of the episcopate was weak enough to summon the attack of William Laud, though its was also sufficiently strong to elicit steady and stinging derision from John Milton. Eleven months after being appointed an Anglican bishop at Norwich, Hall wept openly as Cromwell's troups demolished the interior of the Norwich Cathedral. Here is a man who knew of life's „difficult problems", as Luther called them, and someone who had great interest in Solomonic wisdom. Hall wrote various books on protestant meditation, similar to our contemporary concern with „spirituality", and on wisdom as a response to contemporary philosophy. Though Hall showed no awareness of Luther's lectures on Ecclesiastes he published originally in 1609 an anthology of biblical text from Proverbs and Ecclesiastes ... variously ... entitled: *Solomons Diuine Arts, of 1. Ethickes, 2. Politickes, 3. Oeconomicks: That is; the*

Government of 1. Behaviour, Common-wealth, 3. Familie. Drawne into Method, out of his Prouerbs & Ecclesiastes.[2]

So, we see once again a pre-modern understanding of the Solomonic books as guide to „ethics", „politics" and „economics". Here wisdom was seen to play a special role along these lines within the Bible and it could be distinguished or related to other major inner-biblical idioms, such as Torah (law/teaching), prophecy (promise and judgment), and Gospel.

Biblical Wisdom: Pre-modern Jewish and Christian Interpretation

Prior to the modern period, certain biblical books were regarded as the primary manifestation of wisdom in the Bible. These were the books assigned to Solomon: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Sometimes Job would also be seen as greatly concerned with wisdom, though the archetypal characteristics of biblical wisdom had already been established primarily by the Solomonic books rather than by some extra-biblical criteria of what characterized „wisdom".[3] The wisdom character of the Song of Songs remained only indirectly examined in deference to a typological reading of this book: in Jewish circles, as an analogue for God's love for Israel, and in Christian circles, as a *figura* of Christ's love of the church. Though even here, interpretation surely presumed an apprecation of the plain sapiential sense, for such a literal understanding of the unrelenting compulsion of eroticism is precisely what makes compelling the figural analogy to the mystery of God's boundless grace for a rebellious elect.[4]

Just as some of the superscriptions and some internal content link the Book of Psalms to the narratives about David in books of Samuel and Chronicles, so the narrativies about Solomon in 1 Kings 3–11 and in Chronicles provided a resource for recognizing and refining our hearing of the voice of the same Solomon in these other

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[2] *Solomon's Divine Arts: Joseph Hall's Representation of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs (1609), with Introductory Essays*, ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1991).

[3] On the pre-modern identification of wisdom books, see Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, chapter 2, „Biblical Genre Theory: Precepts and Models for Religious Lyric", pp. 31–71, esp. pp. 53–69, in her *Protestant Poetics an the Seventeenth-Century Lyric* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[4] E. Ann Matter, *The Voice of My Beloved: The Song of Songs in Western Medieval Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990) and her „Joseph Hall and the Tradition of Christian Interpretation of the Song of Songs", pp. 58–66, in *Solomon's Divine Arts*. Cf. G. Sheppard, „The Role of the Canonical Context on the Interpretation of the Solomonic Books", pp. 72, 101–102, in *Solomon's Divine Arts*.

books.[5] Among English protestants, Hugh Broughton in a lengthy essay, published in 1605, on Ecclesiastes begins with „An abridgement of Salomon's life" before explaining the book within the inner-biblical context of Solomon's life. Similarly, in later editions of Henry Ainsworth's *The Book of Psalms,* we find a short „Life of David" so that we are explicitly reminded how significantly the narrativies about these authors found elsewhere in scripture provided semantic implications for the interpretation of non-narrative books attributed to them.[6] Moreover, we are presumptous if we assume that these pre-modern interpreters were *uncritical* in exploring these intertextual features, for their goals were, at their best, not concerned with harmonizing away what we as moderns see as historical differences. More often than not, they sought a profound intuitive, literal-theological sense rather than either a rigorously historical or a naively literalistic sense. It is easy for us to forget that in the pre-modern priod, *they saw through their own spectacles a different set of differences* in the text than we do through our new fangled tri-focals. Afterall, our glasses should, also, be tinted in order to protect us from dangerous, new rays of the sun that hit our eyes unimpeded by the pre-modern ozone layer. As did readers in any other period, modern readers have their own special advantages and disadvantages over the past.

Within the Old Testament „apocrypha" itself, we have both a self-consciously „wisdom" interpretation of earlier scripture, written in the second-century B. C. by Jesus ben Sira, called *Sirach* or *Ecclesiasticus,* as well as the *Wisdom of Solomon* from the first century A. D.[7] But we also know of many other books, including, the *Psalms of Solomon* (first century B. C.), the *Testament of Solomon* (first to third century A. D.),

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[5] On the similar scholarly studies on David in the biblical narratives and in the Psalms, see Alan Cooper, „The Life and Times of David According to the Book of Psalms", *The Poet and the Historian: Essays in Literary and Histodical Biblical Criticism,* ed. Richard Friedman (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), pp. 117–131; James L. Mays, „The David of the Psalms", *Int* 40 (1986) 143–155; Brevard S. Childs, „Psalms Titles and Midrashic Exegesis", *JSS* 16/2 (1971) 137–150; and G. Sheppard, „Theology of the Book of Psalms", *Int* 46/2 (1992) 143–155. (1992). For Solomon, see David G. Meade, *Pseudonymity and Canon; An Investigation into the Relationship of Authorship an Authority in Jewish and Earliest Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), pp. 44–72, and n. 23.

[6] Hugh Broughton, *A Comment Upon Coheleth or Ecclesiastes: Framed for the Instruction of Prince Henri* (Anno, 1605), 89 pp., and *Henry Ainsworth's The Book of Psalms (1612), with Introductory Essays,* ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 1993). This first edition of Ainsworth's *Psalms* spawned many reprints with minor revisions, sometimes in smaller handbooks with deletion of the annotations for the purpose of merely using the Psalms for singing. The addition of a „Brief Life of David" occurs in a 16.. edition in the rare book collection of General Theological Seminary in New York City.

[7] See Harvey H. Guthrie, *Wisdom and Canon: Meanings of the Law and the Prophets* (Seasbury, N. Y.: Seasbury-Weston Theological Seminary, 1966) and Gerald T. Sheppard, *Wisdom as a Hermeneutical Construct: A Study in the Sapientializing of the Old Testament* („Beiheft zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft", Vol. 151; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1980).

and the *Odes of Solomon* (late first to early second century A. D.). In the late medieval period, numerous other Solomonic traditions circulated widely with the promise of providing their readers with esoteric „keys" that could unlock secrets, from insights into human nature to the control of magic and demons. Much of this literature can be shown to derive from older Jewish and Christian tradition that reaches back even to the dawn of Christianity and rabbinic Judaism. Since the time of Origen until about the twelfth century, Solomonic wisdom as an idiom of Christian faith alongside but often distinct from the Gospel, played a greater role in Christian circles, than in rabbinic Judaism.[8]

In Jewish circles, from about the second century, wisdom began to be used more as sporadic rhetorical and interpretive support for a thoroughgoing emphasis on the Torah, Oral and Written. At the same time, Solomon himself often provided evidence of a this wordly fulfillment of messianic text that Christian assigned to Christ.[9] For its inner-biblical interpretation of wisdom and Torah, rabbinic traditions have generally chosen to move in two directions. Hallachic insight into the Torah could begin with a passage in wisdom books as a way to illuminate the significance of the revealed law; or, biblical and non-biblical wisdom could offer rhetorical support for haggadic exposition of biblical texts. These uses of wisdom are integral to rabbinic interpretation, along with the reminder of Henry Fischel that, „In the rabbinic literature proverbs no longer appear in extensive collections..."[10]

The medieval Midrash Misle, the midrash on the book of Proverbs from about the nineth century A.D., confirms these same essential functions for wisdom. Burton L. Visotzsky in the introduction to his English translation of it comments that „In MM she [Lady Wisdom] is virtually always characterized as Torah – the study of rabbinic teachings – without even recourse to a prooftext to buttress this equation. For the

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[8] See the impressive „Introduction" by D. V. Duling, to the Testament of Solomon, pp. 935–959), in *The Old Testament Pseudoepigrapha: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1983). For an excellent overview of wisdom in the time of Jesus, see David Winston's „Introduction", pp. 4–69, in his *The Wisdom of Solomon* („The Anchor Bible Series", Vol. 43; Garden City: Doubleday, 1979).

[9] C. C. McCowan, „The Christian Tradition as to the Magical Wisdom of Solomon", *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 2 (1922) 14–16. For an overview, see Jacob Neusner, *Torah: From Scroll to Symbol in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) and his *Messiah in Context: Israel's History and Destiny in Formative Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984).

[10] Henry Fischel, „The Transformation of Wisdom in the World of Midrash", p. 72, in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity*, ed. by Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975).

author of MM, there is no wisdom other than that of the rabbinic sages."[11] The last statement deserves further qualification, but what is clear also from the *„hekalot* curriculum" found in the midrash on prov 10:17 is that biblical wisdom, for the sake of atonement, aids in the study of a hierarchy of primary, non-Solomonic sources of Torah: the carious orders of Mishnah, the Midrash on Leviticus („in fact, every rule which Israel had instituted has been derived from it"), Midrashim on „the Five [Books of the Pentateuch]", haggadah, Talmud, Chariot mysticism („I derive no greater pleasure from the world that I created than when the disciples of the sages sit and behold and look and see and contemplate the recitation of all this great teaching.") and Throne of Glory mysticism. Clearly, midrashim on the Writings is not mentioned here and no independent study of other Solomonic wisdom traditions is recommended. Nonetheless, wisdom books (Ecclesiastes is occasionally cited in MM) and midrashim on the Solomonic books prove valuable precisely in so far as they lead to a better understanding of the more central rabbinic traditions that serve as the primary guides, along with all of the Bible, to the divine Torah.

By contrast, we have many instances of Christian proverbial collections, including the Q source underlying the Gospels and in parts of the New Testament book of James.[12] Other extra-biblical collections of wisdom, immitative of the biblical Solomonic books in style and approximate content, recur from the second century to the present.[13] For example, in about the same period as the Jewish Midrash on the Book of Proverbs, we find extensive evidence of riddles and proverbial collections modeled on the biblical Solomonic books. Christians allowed, far more than did Jewish interpreters, for the role of wisdom as a biblically authorized form of discourse that was distinct from theological discourse focused on the Gospel. Elaine Hansen concludes that much later Old English instructional literature looks back to the same paradigm of biblical wisdom. *The Menoloquium,* for example, „examines the relation between traditional, secular wisdom to well-known Christian doctrine and praxis and its affirms the capacity of human modes and systems of understanding to connect and harmonize

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[11] Burton L. Visotzky, *The Midrash on Proverbs: Translated from the Hebrew with an Introduction and Annotations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p. 7. Note the midrash at various places, for example, „What [is scriptural proof for] Torah? *The Lord created me at the beginning of His course, As the first of His works of old*" (Prov. 8:22; p. 46).

[12] James Robinson, „Jesus as Sophos and Sophia: Wisdom Tradition and the Gospels", in *Aspects of Wisdom in Judaism and Early Christianity,* ed. by Robert L. Wilken (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975), pp. 1–16, and John S. Kloppenborg, *The Formation of Q: Tragetories in Ancient Wisdom Collections* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987).

[13] K. Preisendanz, „Salomo", *Pauly–Wissowa Supplement* 8 (1956), cols 660–704; C. C. McCowan, „The Christian Tradition", pp. 1–24 and Duling, see n. 8.

sacred and secular time".[14] Luther's preface to Ecclesiastes and Hall's *Salmons Divine Arts* simply represent familiar moments in the long Christian tradition of generating wisdom literature imitative of the biblical Solomonic text up to the modern period.

In sum, while Jews and early Christians have agreed over the centuries that the Torah and wisdom were complementary, Jews after the second century tended to use wisdom in order to better teach legal observance of the Torah, while Christians preferred to see wisdom as expressive of its own peculiar mode of discourse alongside the Torah and the Gospel. The proverb and parable became traditionally as prominent as a guide to the obedient life for Christianity as was the law for Judaism.

Modern Reconstruction and the Late Modern Rediscovery of Biblical Wisdom

The implicit historical references within biblical narratives about Solomon became historically suspect when measured by modern criteria. The association of biblical books with key biblical figures such as Moses, David, or Solomon – much as the association of New Testament books with Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John – came to be described as „secondary" or even „non-genuine". Even what might seem to support a historical connection could prove its undoing. The editorial comment found in Proverbs 25:1 illustrates this point: „These are the Proverbs of Solomon which the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied". R. B. Y. Scott inferred from the statement that „Solomonic" proverbs must not, in fact, have been in circulation at the time, three centuries after Solomon's death. So, when King Hezekiah's scribes create a „copy" of Solomonic proverbs, we have every reason to be suspicious and sceptical about its historical origins.[15] James Crenshaw's standard introduction to „Old Testament Wisdom" concludes bluntly and confidently, „Wisdom and Solomon have nothing to do with one another".[16]

Since the decline of the Biblical Theology Movement and Neoorthodoxy in the 1960's, a substantially new direction is required, if we are to take seriously the criticism of modernity as well as a reassessment of pre-modern scriptural interpretation. For the purpose of this essay, I cannot review the exciting history of wisdom research throughout the modern period. Fortunately there are many good historical surveys

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[14] Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *The Solomon Complex: reading Wisdom in Old English Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p. 116.

[15] R. B. Y. Scott, „Solomon and the Beginnings of Wisdom in Israel", *VTSup* 3 (1960) 262–279, reprinted in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. James Crenshaw (New York City: KATV, 1976), pp. 84–101. See also his *The Way of Wisdom* (New York City: Macmillan Company, 1967)

[16] James Crenshaw, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom Literature* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), p. 50.

readily avaiable.[17] My aim here is only to sketch some features in what I see as a fresh approach to the biblical text and the subject of wisdom within current biblical studies and theology.

My own orientation to the Bible falls within what Brevard S. Childs now calls simply a „canonical approach" and Rolf Rendtorff calls „composition criticism".[18] These approaches try to take seriously what happens to pre-biblical traditions when they become parts of a scripture. The pre-history of biblical books becomes less important than our perception of how they have been incorporated into the realistic depiction of the Bible itself. If the Bible fails to meet modern standards of history, that problem becomes less important if we recognize that the actual purpose of the Bible is to offer, within the limits of its own human witness, a revelation of reality. In that case, the realism of the Bible is less determined by the historical accuracy of its implied ostensive references to an ancient past than by its literary-canonical capacity to offer a realistic depiction capable of conveying and illustrating the subject matter of Torah, prophetic in...tion, wisdom, and the Gospel.

A canonical approach ought to employ the widest range of critical scholarship. On the one hand, it must resist any impression of being a synchronic, vaguely „literary" strategy. Few phrases sound more tautological than „Bible as literature". What was it before? The result of an explosion in a print shop? On the other hand, it ought to be able to appreciate the heuristic importance of the newer social-scientific investigations of the Bible championed by Norman Gottwald, Wayne Meeks, and many others.[19]

Without negating the value of various approaches to the Bible for equally diverse purposes, I want to focus on the question of how the Bible's own late form and function warrants its use by readers. In simple terms, I want to know how to read the Bible biblically. Rather than emphasizing the power and influence of its first interpretive community or other types of reader response criticism, I prefer to understand how the text itself invites biblical interpretation and gives it some direction, regardless of who the future readers may be. This approach is text-oriented, but without a naive assumption that „the" text is a fixed „object". Rather the biblical text is as much a subject with its own voice as it is an object. „The text" of such a scripture can signify,

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[17] Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems in Biblical Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1985), pp. 168–186; and Donn Morgan, *Wisdom in Old testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981).

[18] Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Contex* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 6–17 and Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), pp. 129–131.

[19] Cf. Norman Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Intorduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985); Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); and various essays in *The Bible and the Politics of Exegesis,* ed. by David Jobling, Peggy Day, and Gerald T. Sheppard (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1991).

at most, an efficient textual arena, a demarcated and dynamic territory in which interpretation can take place.

We might assume that the Bible testifies to God's revelation only by reference to extra-biblical words and events as they once occurred in the ancient world and that the warrants of the Bible as a scripture rest entirelly on the accuracy of its reference to these moments in the past. As soon as the historical accuracy of the earliest traditions become a matter of dispute, as we have already seen in the case of Solomon and wisdom, the trustworthiness of scripture seems in jeopardy. Moveover, we discover historically that almost no one in ancient Israel, including the key prophets, originally intended to write „scripture". Of course, the same may be said of the New Testament, for example, for Paul's letters and for the Lukan editor's original effort to write an „orderly account". Luke, as a book, is later separated from its second volume, still later called „Acts", when believers began to read the torso of this two volume work as only one „Gospel" – the so-called „Gospel of Luke" – among four others.[20] If the intent of the „original" historical persons associated we read as scripture works written in their names?

Canonical or compositional approaches to the Bible since the 1960's have altered both how we might ask and answer these questions about scripture. First, we see some contradictions in the older or modern Biblical Theology Movement since, fo example, most reconstructed traditions prior to the formation of a Bible are technically not „biblical traditions" at all, but „pre-biblical traditions". Therefore, they are not so obviously a better source than the Bible itself for discovering something called „biblical faith". Second, propentents of „Biblical Theology" tended to use the Bible merely as a piously impaired reference to an ancient world of historically recoverable words and deeds which could, then, be subjected to another equally pious interpretation by modern exegetes. Many of us began to be aware of our hermeneutical preference for a historical and theological interpretation of a reconstructed history. Third, a closer examination of the Bible itself demonstrates that the late form and function of biblical „books", as we now know them, coincides with a later usage, offering some explicit internal warrants for them to be read as „scripture" within Judaism and Christianity. Later editors often provide us with what I have called „canon conscious redactions", linking biblical books with other biblical books the core of which may not have originally been intended to be read together.[21] Hence, we become aware of a late historical and textual interdependence of biblical books qua biblical books.

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[20] See Raymond Brown, *The Critical Meaning of the Bible* (Paulist Press, 1981), pp. 29–34.

[21] Gerald T. Sheppard, „Canonization: Hearing the Voice of the Same God Through Historically Dissimilar Traditions", *Interpretation* 34/1 (1982) 21–33.

Some general implications for Solomonic books and biblical wisdom follow. First, what we can know about the historical Solomon does not fully coincide and even contradicts certain details within the biblical presentation of Solomon. Regardless, it is precisely the „biblical Solomon", rather than our modern reconstruction of the „historical Solomon", who is presented in the Bible as the nomen „author" of biblical wisdom in Jewish scripture and in the Old Testament. The biblical Solomon can be just as „realistic" – just as human, vulnerable, and blown about by the winds of time and circumstance – as the historical Solomon. The biblical Solomon can also speak in a fully human „voice", with a personality as distinctive as any other biblical and extra-biblical figure, and the voice of the biblical Solomon can assert things with its own realistically unpredictable mix of authority and insecurity, eloquence and bad prose.

Therefore, if contextual „realism" or the capacity of a text to render a reality is integral to the nature of scripture, this capacity can be shown to exist within the biblical presentation of wisdom with only an indirect relationship to modern historical knowledge. Our acceptance of the validity and sufficiency of biblical realism for the purpose of a theological understanding of scripture need not be weakened by our recognition that a very different conception of „realism" gained ascendancy during the renaissance and in most of the older modern historical criticism.[22] The logic of scripture itself requires its own type of realism so that the perforcely human nature of a biblical „testimony" is expressed through the circumstantial and ordinary language of persons, like us, who are participants in history. This realistic biblical witness of scripture is, thus, itself fully historical and human, as scripture itself requires, even if it appears as the compositional byproduct of editing and does not represent a perfect survival of some earlier historical witnesses to similar claims about God's presence and revelation. The „intent" of this human witness in scripture pertains to the voice and intent of this biblical presentation, far more directly than to the intention, bias, ideas, or religious ideology of the reconstructed original „authors" of pre-biblical tradition or even later „editors". Late editors reflect to some degree their dependence on the patronage of a specific community of readers, and otherwise, their ideological *Tendenzen* are often sporadically registered and further blunted or context and subject matter of scripture itself. They usually exhibit their own peculiar „anxiety of influence", common to specialists who must preserve something if they will have any hope of interpreting it. What is foregrounded most of all is the presentation of the biblical witness itself in the mouth of specific biblical *personae,* in this case, in the human voice of the biblical Solomon.

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[22] See Eugene F. Rice, *The Renaissance Idea of Wisdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958), on the reformation view of wisdom, pp. 147–149, and his chapter on „The Transformation of Wisdom from Knowledge to Virtue", chapter 6, pp. 149–177.

A canonical approach demands a late modern reassessment of Solomon and the Solomonic traditions in the Bible. First, we see that the biblical Solomon is presented as someone whose life is bith attractive and tragic. In the narrative at the beginning of this account, which describes his asking for the gift of wisdom, he poignantly summarizes his need of practical knowledge as a new king of Israel: „I am only a little child, I do not know how to go out or come in" (1 Kgs 3:7b). The wisdom of Solomon is that basic, a skill to know when to go out the door and when to come in the door. Then, he expresses some specific political, economic, and ethical dimensions pertinent to the wisdom, „Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern this your great people?" (v. 9.) The narrative mixes praise of his building the temple and establishing a great liturgical tradition alongside an admission that „his heart had turned away from the Lord" (1 Kgs 11:9; cf. 1:3b). We see the man in prayer and the mighty king seduced by compromises of faith made in the name of love. He is someone like us, not a type or symbol but a real person, perhaps more impressive than ourselves but certainly as unworthy as ourselves to be a witness to divine revelation.

Second, this presentation of a biblical Solomon serves, at a minimum, as a literary device that marks off whole books according to the subject matter of wisdom, just as the biblical Moses is the *persona* who gives primary witness to the five-book Torah. Note the resemblance between the editorial conclusion of Deuteronomy – „there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (34:10) – and the assurance by God to Solomon immediately after God gave him the gift of „an understanding mind" (I Kgs 3:9) – „I gave you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you." (v. 12). Within the larger biblical depiction of its subject matter, Moses is to Torah what Solomon is to wisdom. Editorial depatures support this idea by various overt signs of intertextuality among the Solomonic parts of the Bible, so that the narrative about Solomon becomes within the Bible a key implicit text and an interpretive aid to our understanding of the Solomonic books both in themselves and in relation to the Torah in scripture as a whole.

From the narrative account in 1 Kings 19 we hear that the Queen of Sheba travelled all the way from the southern tip of the Sinai peninsula „to test him with riddles/hard questions" (v. 1). In the description of both his ability to answer and in what she says, a definition of wisdom is presupposed. She observes as evidence of wisdom „the house that he had built, the food of his table, the seating of his officials, the attendance of his table, the seating of his officials, the attendence of his servants, their clothing, his valets, and his burnt offerings that he offered at the house of the Lord" (vv. 4–5). In other words, his wisdom goes beyond his genius to answer questions to his skills in building an architectually impressive home, in managing his household,

in providing gourmet food and fashionable clothing, and even in the liturgical excellence of his sacrifice and worship. These same themes and especially that of building and maintaining a household recur as key features in the organization of the Solomonic books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The book of Proverbs interweaves the refrain that „wisdom builds a house" throughout the entire collection (cf. 9:1; 14:1; 24:3). Contrasting metaphors within individual sayings about the respective houses of wisdom and of folly, as well as references to „the house of the righteous" and that of the wicked recur throughout the book. Likewise, Ecclesiastes opens with a recollection of Solomon's wisdom as exhibited by his architectual triumphs (1:4–8), accompained by a brilliantly managed household complete with great music („singers", v. 8). At the close of the book, the temporal nature and limits of wisdom (its „vanity" or „vapor-likeness") finds illustration in the description of a house that falls into deterioration when it is no longer maintained (12:1–8). Similarly, sub-themes in the narrative in 1 Kings about the aim of wisdom to „execute justice and righteousness" is echoed throughout the Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (e.g. Prov 1:3; Eccl 4:17). Solomon's love for his wives in 1 Kgs 3:1 and especially in 11:1–2 („Solomon clung to these in love") coordinates well with the positive celebration of the wisdom of eroticism in the Song of Songs. Between the narrative and these Solomonic books, we see clearly that the themes of love and justice play a central role and gain explication within the sapiential idiom of the Bible itself, as well as within the idioms of Torah and prophecy.[23]

Third, the biblical presentation of Solomon's wisdom asserts a particular relationship between the idiom of biblical wisdom and other key idioms of the Bible, such as Torah and prophecy, and, later for Christians, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Within the Solomonic books we may be surprised at how consistently they omit language about the Torah, narrative about the prophets and Israel's salvation history. We hear nothing of the Exodus, the giving of the law at Sinai, the special covenant with Israel, or the specific holiness laws or guidance in the proper worship of God. In fact, even prayer in the proverbs could be easily confused by an outsider with Egyptian or Assyrian prayer to some other God. The admission within the book itself that some of its saying are borrowed from non-Israelites sharpens this difference with other Old Testament traditions. Within the context of the Old Testament, one might say that the Solomonic books show a remarkable and intentional restraint on the part of Solomon. He is presented as self-consciously bracketing out any mention of many traditions he himself considered central to Israelite faith in order to present wisdom as an idiom in unique conversation with the nations and a subject they will recognize as familiar,

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[23] Cf. Gerald T. Sheppard, „The Relation of Solomon's Wisdom to Biblical Prayer", pp. 7–27, in *Scriptures and Cultural Conversations: Essays for Heinz Guenther,* ed. John Kloppenborg and Leif Vaage (*Toronto of Theology Journal* 8/1; Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

important, and impressively represented by Solomon. This biblical wisdom shares, even historically retains, some features form ancient Near Eastern wisdom, but is not historically identical with any particular moment among the varieties of Israelite views of wisdom that we can rediscover in the biblical pre-history. Similarly, the book of James in the New Testament explores wisdom with minimal reference to the Gospel.

Rabbinic tradition expressed this feature of biblical wisdom by the advice, „Should someone tell you that there is wisdom among the nations, belive it (Obad. 8), but if he tells you there is Torah among the nations, do not believe it."[24] Scripture, therefore, has established by means of Solomon and the Solomonic books a specialized inner-biblical relationship between the something called „wisdom" in the Bible and other topics, such as the Torah and prophecy. The narrative about Solomon has this same tension built into it. After Solomon receives God's gift of wisdom, God demands *in addition* that he must obey the laws („my statutes and my commandments", 1 Kgs 3:14; cf. 6:11–13; 9:4–9) of the Torah as did his father David. The chief failure of Solomon pertains to his failure to obey the Torah rather than any loss of wordly fame for his wisdom (11:4–8).

My point here is that the Bible depicts a special relationship between Torah and wisdom. This relationship is explored partly in the biblical narrative concerned with Solomon's wisdom and his disobedience of the Torah in 1 Kings 3–11. We best learn about it there, if we wish to understand the scriptural witness to revelation, far better than by any pious speculation we might venture regarding the various different relationships that once existed between ancient Near Eastern forms of wisdom and law. Nonetheless, the latter investigation is still important and essential for a modern scholar, for it contributes directly to the grammar of the text by exposing that deeper pool of possibilities from which the Bible itself derives and asserts its own admittedly eccentric presentation.

In sum, there is an significant logic within the biblical presentation of wisdom that we have almost entirely forgotten in the modern period. This logic alone belongs to the larger claim of scripture that these traditions have a capacity to be heard together as a witness to the same Word of God. Wisdom is clearly not a secular alternative for Solomon receives its as a gift from God. The Solomonic books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes assert repeatedly that wisdom finds its beginning in the fear of God and Proverbs states unequivocally, „For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (2:6). Proverbs 30 answers the question about whether wisdom is too far away by even citing other parts of scripture (Prov 10:5, cf. Sam 22:31; Prov 10:6, cf. Deut 4:2) and the epilogue to Ecclesiastes overtly insists that wisdom must

[24] Fischel, *Aspects of Wisdom*, p. 71, see esp. p. 90n32.

be held together with the Torah.[25] But biblical wisdom addresses issues of truth in its own way, in language that the world can easily understand. This self-conscious effort to rival and share wisdom with the world brackets out religious language ideosyncratic to the Torah and to the Gospel.

Now I want to return to Luther's and Hall's assumption that the Solomonic books are concerned with, among other things: ethics, politics and economics. In my view, biblical wisdom points to a wide range of common knowledge that is shared with the neighbors of Jews and Christiansregardless of their religious beliefs. Social-scientific analysis, Marxist criticism of society, the cultural grasp of the insidious logic of racism, studies in sexology, theories of macro-economics, psychoanalysis, and a philosophy of aesthetics serve us best not when they can be made, more Christian or when someone can interject Christian values or religious jargon into them. As Jews and Christians, we join with scientists, philosophers, psychologists, economists, and artists because all truth comes from God wherever it may be found. We also know that not every truth leads adequately to salvation or to the hope of faith. However, truth of every sort is still absolutely essential because it belongs to the whole truth which theology attempts to address in its own bold manner, grounded in faith.

For the matter of how we interpret scripture, I want to suggest two major roles that biblical wisdom can play in modern interpretation. First, I consider most historical criticism to belong to what the premodern interpreters called the „grammatical sense" of scripture or what I might associate with an etymological or archaeological recovery of the pre-history, often the pre-biblical history, of a scriptural text. An understanding of the grammatical senses, ought never to be considered routinely identical with the search for the literal sense of scripture which seeks to hold text and subject matter together. For this reason, the reformers conceded at times that after a grammatical analysis one may still not be able to discern the literal sense of scripture. So, biblical wisdom embraces along with the rest of the world a wisdom derived from an appreciation of aesthetic criticism, historical inquiry, linguistic and semantic theory, the literary-critical love for differences and so forth.

Second, wisdom belongs to that learned capacity of the interpreter of scripture to come to scripture with profound, rather than trivial and prejudiced questions, and, equally, to the capacity of the interpreter of scripture to be prepared for a fresh hearing of the Word of God. We might say that wisdom ought to protect us from well-intended and often quite sophisticated manipulations of the biblical witness in our efforts to hear what we want to hear from the Word of God. On the other hand, wisdom guarentees that the Bible is that kind of rare book, particularly according to modern customs of

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[25] G. T. Sheppard, „The Epilogue to Qoheleth as Theological Commentary", *CBQ* 39/2 (1977) 182 - 189.

reading, that we will need to read twice, or three times, or more accurately, again and again, the rest of our lives. Its role as a human testimony to God's Word means that while God's Word remains the same our wisdom in grasping it changes over time and, therefore, our practical knowledge of the Word does change in some rather radical ways from one generation to the next. Whoever brings better or wiser questions to the Word of God inevitably runs the risk that they may hear a new response to old questions or problems.

So, in time and with new wisdom, the interpreters must hear the literal sense differently on matters such as, for example. Slavery, the role of woman, and the ethics of homosexualities.

I am quite aware thet this essay has focused more on a grammatical element of scripture than has on timely matters in the late modern hermeneutical debate. Yet, this element of „wisdom" has played a major hermeneutical role which ought to be rediscovered in a late modern understanding of peculiarities of scriptural interpretation. Wisdom in this hermeneutical sense allowed Jews, and, by its adaptations, Christians, to find a non-secular form of discourse with the world. This discourse self-consciously, as in the presentation of Solomon, bracketed out essential features of Torah, prophecy, and for Christians, the Gospel. It found a way for a minority religion to talk publicly about God and even prayer, without offering a solution to the problem of unreconcilable differences between religions in the world. Finally, it made room within scripture itself for the central importance of public discourse about ethics, politics, economics, and, by implications, hermeneutics. Even the most pious in pre-modern times seemed to recognize that such wisdom was necessary if are to bring better questions to other parts of scripture, since wisdom offers us hermeneutically this possibility of new questions that, otherwise, we might be too foolish, too prejudiced, too comfortably moral, or too orthodox, to ask.

Finally, I am convinced that these are hermeneutical fallacies on all sides of the current discussion between the older historical critics and the newer comparative literary approaches. Surprizingly little attention has been given in this debate to comparative religion. So, I want to conclude with a hermeneutical and clearly not a pious observation by a pioneer in the study of comparative religion, Wilfred C. Smith, who once said that „historical criticism has taught us how to read scripture pre-scripturally, the newer literary approaches have taught us how to read it post-scripturally. The only thing we do not know any more is, how to read scripture scripturally".[26]

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[26] From a conversation with Wilfred C. Smith. See also his forthcoming book on comparative scripture. Also, from a comparative religion perspective, see my own „Canon" in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* ad. by Mircea Eliade (New York City: Macmillan, 1987) vol. III. pp. 62–69.

KRISTEN M. ANDERSEN

Imago Dei and Desire in Genesis: 1–3. To Eat or not to Eat; or Rather to Eat or what to Eat

> Repetition is in interest of metaphysics and is further that interest on which metaphysics fail, Repetition is the watchword of any ethical opition, repetition is Condition sine Qua non for every dogmatic problem.
> *Søren Kierkegaard*[1]

The opening of Genesis with its two distinct and different creation accounts is an obvious invitation to offer a particular attention to the intertextual significance of this remarkable repetition. The theme of creation is repeated, and practically a connection is established; here in the form of a contextual and thematic interrelation between the two accounts. Both accounts have long traditions of participation in western ideas of origin and meaning: P (Genesis: 1,1–2,4a) with its suggestive depiction of the creating God as One, absolute and other, sacred and sovereign; J (Genesis: 2,4b–3,25) by nourishing hope and fantasy of mankind with its captivating image of Eden, the garden vigorous green, radiating with light and beauty, the place where God and man were close and confident.

Notably another trait is that not only is the common theme of creation repreated, but repetition rather works at several levels, both in structure and dynamics of P's hymnological account and J's dramatic narrative. In spite of obvious variations in style, content, perspective and narratological device both creation accounts share a particular structure in describing creation, the world, in a movement from chaos to cosmos, significant not because of unity but because of its movement from indifference to a world of distinction.[2] – So far the fall is part of the creation story, as it succesfully names a distinction between God and man. A distinction that is already inhabited in the gestures of the creating God, who neither on behalf of P nor of J can be identified with creation itself.

Yet the structural motives of chaos/cosmos and indifference/difference point towards a major theme shared by P and J, which apart from creation is the theme of

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[1] The translation is mine from S. Kierkegaard, *Samlede voerker,* Vol. 5 second edition (Copenhagen 1962) p. 131.

[2] On the understanding of creation as differentiation, S. Niditch show how Genesis 1–11 is subject to a repeated pattern af the movement from chaos to cosmos, indifference to difference. In: *Chaos to Cosmos* (scholars Press, 1985).

mimesis and desire. Both concepts are ambigous, indicating a positive attention but also a possible violated replacement, which very well epitomize the overarching appointment of the relationship between God and mankind. Similarly the understandings of mimesis and desire in P and J are by no means unequivocal. Rather the two accounts represent a negotiation between Girard's analysis of desire as mimetic, and therefore a violent concept, and Levinas's concept of desire, nonviolent and devoid of mimesis.

Created in the image of God man and woman are close to God, at the center of his attention and subordinated to his desire, yet an abolition of the difference between them is not tolerated. In other words the position of man and woman is potential conflictual. A conflict that is inevitable the greater the likeness. In several ways the motive of mimesis reflects the very condition of humanity presented in both creation accounts:

a) In relation to the similarity involved in the idea of Imago Dei. (Genesis 1: 26–27)

b) In the very close and explicit relation between man and dust. (Genesis 2: 7. 3:19)

c) Since major reason in the serpent's successful argument in temptation. (Genesis 3:4)

d) In the divine reason for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden: „Look man has become like one of us to know good and evil." (Genesis 3:22).

No doubt mimesis is a highly ambigous category. Rene Girard seems to be the one critic, who most appropriate to P and J describes humanity to be caught in a double bind, a contradicting double imperative, whereby every command: Imitate me! immediately is followed by annother command: Don't imitate me! In Girard's terms that really means, don't appropriate my object.[3]

The interrelation at work can not be pinned down as a sort of continous narration, much more what we have is a kind of dramatic negotiation on the relationship between God and man determined by mimesis and desire. Together the two accounts disrupt any rigid ideas of origin as something only confined to the past in favour of an understanding that meaning originates from the situation that mankind is always already reverted to something or someone other than itself. In the creation accounts the human being relates so closely both to God and to the earth, that the other is continually in danger of being replaced by the same. Therefore, because of the enigmatic tension between Imago Dei and the reason for the expulsion of man and woman from the garden of Eden, that they have become like God, the intertextual play on the topic of mimesis and desire form a connection between the abolition of the difference between Creator and creation, and the death of the other. The death of God

[3] R. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore, London 1977) p. 147.

is the death of man! This statement is not only posed but just as well opposed by the creation accounts.

In the following analysis, after a preliminary remark, P and J will be interpreted exactly from the point of view of their common interest on mimesis in order to show how they interrelate on this particular matter and how both accounts in virtue of the differences between P's theocentric and J's anthropocentric perspectives throw light on the ambigous category of mimesis by reflecting on the questions of violent replacement or irreplaceability.

A Preliminary Remark

In recent literary interpretations J is often rather unambigously recognized as a myth of loss. Often with direct references to the myth of loss par excellenece: Freud's gothic myth about the primeval patricide commited by a horde of sons, the primeval crime and the expulsion of Eden is understood as an absence of every idea of authority and oneness. Two recent examples of this understanding is Mieke Bal's *Sexuality, Sin, and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character* and Harold Bloom's *The Book of J.*

Out of an ideological interest Mieke Bal places a totemistic fratricide into the scene of transgression, by presenting the act of eating as an act of cannibalism of the patricidal authority and thereby as an act to erase the authorial quest of obedience all together.[4]

Bloom launches a similar interpretation though of a more sophisticated version, which is yet another exercise of Bloom's skill to synthesize interpretative communities af a particular text into a fantastic ironic narrative. Typically Book of J is presented as an authors comment: Jahve is an imp rebelling against his mother, who is the creative writer: J. The writing of J is explicitly turned from a dream of family romance into a freudian family of rivalry. On behalf of this interpretative plot Bloom doesn't even have to imply the totemistic fratricide into the narrative of temptation as the father is already displaced into the authorial frame of his fantasy. God has long since been dead.[5]

Conclusively, Bal and Bloom present two different ways of excluding theological inquiry of J. In interest of emancipation and ideological suspicion towards all authorities, Bal assimilates P into J and Bloom on his side performs an agressive dismissal of P, as P doesn't care to perform a rival narrative.[6]

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[4] M. Bal, „Sexuality, Sin and Sorrow: The Emergence of the Female Character" In: *Lethal Love. Feminist literary Readings of the Biblical Love Stories* (Indiana 1987) p. 122–125.

[5] H. Bloom and D. Rosenberg, *Book of J* (New York 1990) p. 25–35.

[6] Ibid. p. 28.

By comparison Bal and Bloom exhibit that ideology critique and neoromanticism not only share a certain Protestant swerve in the desire to incorporate J in spite of tradition, but reversely they also agree on another particular point. By theory and practice they aim towards an aesthetic where interpretation is a matter of usurpation. From the startingpoint interpretation is admitted a violent exercise of mimesis, devoid even of the sligthest desire to meet or to be told by the other of the text. For the same reasons Bal and Bloom, however eager they might be to voice something other than tradition, are always in danger of engaging in a solipsistic exercise only to manifest the world and self of the reader. This trait is evidently outspoken in Bloom's poetics where the anxiety of influence urge the ephebe, the potential poet not just to participate in the original source of poetry but to become the origin by usurpation.[7]

The intertextual play on the topic of mimesis between P and J participate in the discussion of usurpation and violence, but in comparison with the freudian myth of patricide there is no killing in the garden of Eden, but a prohibited act of eating. This difference is of importance as eating better than murder signify the act of incorporation and thereby also the issue of replacement. In order to outline the questions of replacement and irreplaceability in relation to the other J carefully picked the theme of eating. This theme is easily lost if the intertextual play between P's description of Imago Dei and J's narrative with temptation and expulsion is ignored.

The Sovereign Creator

P and J share the idea of the sovereign creator, but whereas P's depiction, due to the theocentric perspective, is uniquivical, J's picture of God epitomizes a greater sense of ambivalence as it is subordinated to an anthropocentric perspective.

P's account of creation is formed as a glorification praise to the sovereign creator. The style is hymnal and the perspective is divine, concerned with the large plan of creation. The account is theocentric in so far as the Creator is the only performative subject.

The narrator of P is omniscient, only interrupted by the creator's direct speech. The creator's sacred and sovereign power appear in a sublime tension between the implied transcendence of God's creative will and the transparency of creation. A tension which in style and intent is the nerve of P, and which is minutely unfolded in the creators handling of the world from the state of indifferential nothing to a blessed world of distinct differences. Potentially this tension is ambivalent, as the almighty just as well may cause a created cosmos as the destructive chaos (Gen: 6,7. 7,10. 8,1ff). But in P's account the hymnal style and the controlled design contrive that the potential

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[7] H. Bloom, *Anxiety of Influence* (New York, 1973).

ambivalence is balanced. In reverse the creator is described as one unequivocally in support of the creation. The creator's omniscience radiates a curious and strange neutrality, which makes any anger or rejection of creation appear as not very real but only as a highly theoretical possibility.

With the hymnal counterbalance of the tension between the transparency of creation and transcendency of the creator's will, P articulates a merging of the two, indirectly proclaiming that where God's light shines and order appears the world is identical with its intention. In other words P inform a coherence between the will of God expressed in the demanding monologue and the coinage of these in creation.

The counterbalanced ambivalence of God is also manifest by P's careful erasure of the traditional theme of an original chaos which fight (Chaoskampf). (Ps: 93,3–4. 74,12–4. 89,10–13. Job:38). The important difference in comparison with P is, that in related cosmogonies and theogonies it is the immanent forces of chaos which ultimately are the origin of the created cosmos. But in P only dim reminiscences of an erased chaos fight are left. The formless elements are attributed no dynamic power, but functions rather as a possible negation of creation, as nongenerative elements. (Genesis 1:2.6) The immanent forces of nature are dethroned and P sets forth the vision that the world is a product of the will of God.

The deep significance of the counterbalanced ambivalence of God is further supported by the way in which the divine demands of creation acts in the P's hymnal context explicate obedience. An aspect which is neatly put forward through the ongoing shift between God's demanding speech followed by a confirming sight. The spoken proclamations originate from God's transcendent will, from somewhere that is not of the world. This act of *creatio ex nihilo* is not concerned with any question about material, but does only serve the theme of obedience. An aspect which is precisely demonstrated by P's use of direct speech. Opposite the senses the ability to speak, either through the voice or writing, is an instrument to present connections or to talk about things that doesn't necessarily originate from the moment or the place, where a particular issue is put forward. The senses to see, smell, taste, hear and feel belong to the moment the experience takes place, whereas any incident of language can be foreign to the place it is outspoken or read. The aim of this simple comparison between language and senses may serve to show the effects of style used by P in order to manifest the sovereign creator. Whatever the creator says does really appear. When God saw that everything is good subsequent of every act of creation, then the will to create has appeared in the world. Together the proclaimed speech and confirming sight depict a pattern of obedience which manifests both the omniscient will in creation and that the Creator is one in world and act.

Imago Dei

The creation act of Imago Dei is the culmination of P's account whereby Good's intimate relation with creation is sealed. This intimate relation is proclaimed by the very introduction: „Lets make mankind in our image to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26), which on one side signifies that mankind derive its identity facing the creator and on the other side points out that God desires creation through his relationship with mankind. The fact that mankind receives the same blessing as other living creatures on the earth (Gen: 1,22. 28), leave no doubt that the intention of P is that man and woman fully belong as parts of the created world in spite of the demand to rule over creation. Yet the creation of mankind causes a remarkable deviation in style announced straight away by the voluntative and by the remarkable continuation of direct speech: „I give you all herbs..", (Genesis 1:29) which refrains the creation of the plants (Genesis 1:11) and for the first time in P introduces the theme of eating. God addresses man and woman directly as somebody standing opposite of him, whom he doesn't make an object of his will, but whom he faces. Maybe for the same reason the creation of mankind is not followed immediately by the usual words of confirming sight, they only follow as a conclusion of fulfilment of the entire creation (Genesis 1:31). Face to face God doesn't talk about man and woman, but explicitly to them.

The creation of mankind in the image of God (salam) and in resemblance (demut) with God presupposes a mimetic movement. Salam and demut are used as synonymous concepts (Gen: 5,1. 9,6), but hold never the less a slight deviation. Salam may signify a sculpture whereas demut more presents an abstract idea of the same: depiction, resemblance, likeness. As the concepts are used synonomously there are no reasons to believe that demut express a dimming of the material rendering of a sculpture. On the other hand it might be of significance that salam and demut are used together in v. 26 and even repeated in v. 27. The aim could be to emphasize something particular.

The distinctive feature of a sculpture in comparison with other types of depiction is its uprightness, which dominates the designed material. A sculpture determines and creates a room out of the space where it is placed. And the creature is placed as a sculpture opposite God in the space of the world. As such Imago Dei describes both a movement, which is the act of creation, and something statuary.[8]

Created in the image of God man and woman, opposite the rest of the creation, are in an immediate relation with God. Following P's overall sceme the Imago Dei does not lead to an abolition of difference between Creator and creation. God stays in his

[8] The connection between statue, mass and space, see the excellent study of: M. Serres *Statues* (Edition Francois Bourin, Paris 1987).

omniscience other than creation, consequently man and woman can not seek the immediacy to God in themselves as creatures, but only from the point that mankind is desired by God.

Face to face the desirable relation between God and mankind can be found at the core of the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, who in the image of the face epitomizes an idea of desire devoid of violent mimesis. To Levinas infinity appear in the finite image of the other's face.[9] And because desire always, opposite to need, is attracted by the unattainable other, the other's face is the image of a total opening of transcendence. Distance reinscribed in the appealing other, just opposite of me. The infinity of the other's face is stronger than murder, simultaneously explicating a naked resistance and no resistance at all. The etical resistance. God is the absolute Other, just as creation must be total other to God and therefore at the very center of his desire.

The reference to Levinas relates J's creation account directly to the Imago Dei. Here mankind is at the very center of the creator's loving attention, when the breath of God is blown into the nostrils of the first humanbeing (ha-adam), face to face. But through the narrative of J desire between God and mankind is oresented in other forms, mistaken as need, as mimetic desire.

Creation at Eye Level

Opposite to P, the account of J is creation viewed at eye level. The omniscient perspective with its scene of grand cosmology is left, and consequently the world is typically depicted as surroundings meeting the needs of humankind and epitomized due to the range of forms and as such subject to human judgement. In J's version the theme of creation is repeated in the social sphere in order to introduce light and shade into the image of man and woman.

Right from the beginning in the short cosmological prelude of J the story is intonated as such, in the way of which the chaos waters of P in J's version is presented as a specific lack of food and respectibly implying the threat of starving to death (Genesis 2:5). In this prelude not only the life outside of Eden is foreseen, but the presentation of food as a major motive introduces just as well life in Eden with easy access to food, the demand of what to eat and what not to eat, and the transgression by eating.

Exactly the aspect of eating in J is most often passed in silence. Either the act of eating is erased in the name of symbolism or it is explained away overruled by a certain murder: that will be the patricide commited by the horde of sons or the

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[9] E. Levinas, Fore example *Totality and Infinity* (M. Nijhoff, Haag 1979) p. 199.

surrogate victim of Christianity.[10] But how come that J is so obsessed with the idea of eating? There is possibility that the transgression makes more sense when read as an actual act of eating. And also that the act of eating signifies something of a much more fundamental meanness, that can't be limited to a question of sexuality of murder, but may possibly be seen in wider terms in the realm of the social sphere. The reason to seek an interpretation focussing on eating, is due to the fact that even though the transgression is followed by the judgement of death, the first murder, the fratricide is committed outside the garden of Eden and the taboes of sexuality do not make sense in relation to Adam and Eve.

So what I will attempt to answer is how the knowledge of good and evil relates to the likeness of God, in the act of eating. And to precede we might as well ask, citing Feuerbachs answer to Kant's Question: „Was ist der Mensch?": Der Mensch ist was er isst. Lars Henrik Schmidt,[11] a Danish scholar of History of Ideas suggests, that the social act of eating, the aesthetics of dining together articulates a meanness (en gemenhed). The act of sharing a meal is an articulation naturally, culturally and socially. With a reference to Georg Simmel's: *Sociologie der Mahlzeit,* Schmidt describes how the act of eating, signifying the most common thing of any community, at the same time implicate the most peculiar aspects in terms of property and individuality. What the single person is eating no other person can possibly eat. Simmel draws the conclusion that the aim of sharing a meal is to abolish individualism. In terms of any social frame the meal confirm an overcoming of individuality. But at least in the aspect of cannibalism, Simmel is wrong, Schmidt stresses. Because exactly a cannibalistic act would be the way of eating the same by means of eating the other. When cannibalism doesn't take place, there is a surrender from consuming the other and thereby a confirmation of the other as antropos.

Der Mensch ist was er isst specifically as the one is remarkable to the other as nobody can eat what any individual incorporates. Physiologically, Scmidt points out, this is of course banal, but the banality whithers away when the individual and the social synthesize in a horizon of aesthetics whereby the meanness of individuality is overcome by manners seem to intermingle with the ethical issue, which subversively turn out to be the exact opposite: Der Mensch ist nicht was er isst. The orientation to surrender confirm the other as an irreplaceable other.

Now how is this socioanalytical suggestion of meanness applicable to the story of Adam and Eve and the eating of the three of knowledge. Or in other words, how

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[10] For an example of an erasure in tha name of symbolism: H. C. White, „Direct and Third Person Discourse in the Narrative of the Fall", In: *Semeia* 18 (1980) p. 93; An example of a patricidal murder, see M. Bal, *Lethal Love.* (Indiana 1987) p. 123.

[11] L. H. Scmidt, *Smagens analytik* (Århus 1991) p. 91-97.

does the double bind: Eat! Do not Eat! correspond with the double bind: Imitate me! Don't imitate me!

Creation of Man and Woman

In comparison with P's proclaiming description of the creation of man and woman, J is extremly accurate and almost provincial. The creation of man and woman has two phases, a point which has originated two traditions of interpretation. The most common is the one that believes man to be the first human creature (Genesis 2:7) and the woman to be derived from man (Genesis 2:23). The other tradition, which is more subtle, argue that God in the beginning created an androgyn being or an earthling of no specific sex (Genesis 2:7), and that only in the second phase of creation God devided the human earth creature in two, respectively a man and a woman (Genesis 2:23). The crucial insight of the second tradition is that the attention is directed towards J's eminent point of view that mankind is always related to something or someone other than it self. Neither man nor woman are absolute entities. Quite the opposite, every single human being is always related and therefore irreplaceable.

The most cunning interpretation in regard of the androgyn creature I have come across, belong to a Talmud discussion translated and commented by Levinas. The appeal to discuss is typically opened by a question closely connected with writing – in this particular interpretation the question is, why jijtzār is spelled with a double i (jod), (jazar is the verb used when God model man and animal out of the dust of the arable land). What puzzles the learned rabbies is that only in the case when man was designed jazar deviates from the usual spelling. Instead of jitzär it is suddenly spelled jiitzär. To open a reflection with something as peripheral as a question of spelling serves as an unique invitation to reflect on what it is to be human.[12] At some point it is suggested that the double jod may signify the good and the evil thought. But the opponents remind that also animal can be the cause of evil action. Instead it is agreed more plausible that the double jod signifies two faces of the first being. The suggestion of this androgyn being leads the rabbies into a rather typical and not very remarkable consideration whether man or woman are most important in terms of who's face was to appear first (Genesis 2:22). But what is worth notifying about the consideration is the way by which it is solved. It is suggested that banah, which is usually translated to build in relation to the creation of the second human being out of the side or the rib (sala) of the first human being, signifies that God is constructing something on the woman's head. More precisely that God plaited the woman's hair in order to make her attractive to man. The indirect and not outspoken consequence of this interpretation is that man

[12] E. Levinas, *Du sacre au saint* (Les edition de Minuit, Paris) p. 128.

appear first, as he is without plaits. Apart from the fact that this midrash about God in disguise as divine hairdresser, is both amusing and cunning, the rabbies does also offer an important motive by the midrash, which is that in concern of humanity formalistic and aesthetic dimensions are taken into consideration. This particular motive is confirmed by the text, when the man burst into poetry at first sight of the woman and even explicitly formulated by the minigenealogy (Genesis 2,23–24). Human actions are not only a matter of act following word, as in the case of divine speech, but they are just as much a question of habit, taste, adulation, practice and norms. In other words the social sphere is not only determined ethically but also aesthetically.

The first phase of the making of mankind from the mud of the arable land causes an etymological pun in hebrew between the material of earth (ha-adamah) and earthling (ha-adam).[13] The earthling is taken from the mass of mud and the connection is so close that it is hardly possible to distinguish the one from the other. Likewise in the scene of judgement the mass of mud of the arable land is in focus, when God proclaims:

> As you sow the sweat of your face so you will reap your bread, till you return to earth – from it yoou were taken. Dust you are, to dust you return. (Genesis 3:19.)[14]

Thereby is the narrative course from creation to judgement framed and determined by indifference, which in the last instance is the reality of death.

In the second phase of the creation of man and woman the motive of earth is replaced by the motive of flesh. God designs the flesh as if it could be earth (Genesis 2:21), and in the short genealogy the motive of flesh is carrying a cultural significance:

> So a man parts from his mother and father, clings to his wife: they become one flesh (Genesis 2:24).[15]

The meeting between man and woman causes the first direct speech by mankind. Before hand the commandments have been received in silence. And even though the meeting between man and woman follows immediately upon the scene about the naming of the animals, this naming is narrated in third person discourse, which is

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[13] D. Rosenberg translates ha-adam as earthling in order to emphasize the pun. P. Trible translates earth creature fore the same reason. D. Rosenberg and H. Bloom, *Book of J* (New York 1990) p. 65; P. Trible, „A Love Story gone Awry", in: God and the *Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia 1978) p. 78–80.

[14] D. Rosenbergs' translation *Book of J* (New York 1990) p. 65.

[15] Ibid. 62.

an indication by style that the animals are not fit as company to man. Opposite to God, who in virtue of omniscience continually is epitomized in the way where his speech may be interpreted in narrow relation with the will to act, mankind is subordinate to the fact that the words of speaking to the other is part of a context, in which there is no inevitable or divine congruity between word and act. Poetry is an act per se. An utterance which as most human speech may be understood in relation with the other. Yet in the same way as it was hard to distinguish between earth and mankind, there is another etymological pun in play in man's poetry:

> „This one is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh" said the man. „Woman (issa) I call her, out of man (iss) she was parted" (Genesis 2:23)

Indeed enigmatic poetry. Even the material is of the same there are reasons, face to face, to make a difference and to desire the other. Forms of life relate in a meaningfull way so that mankind now can be distinguished as man (iss) and woman (issa). On the other hand there is given notice of a possible and life threatening replacement. Within the scene of creation, however, this possibility is opposed dramatically by the double commandment and by the curious pericope about the creation of the animals.

The Double Commandment

The aim of the double commandment is to protect the life of the other and to stress what it is to be human. For the same reason the double commandment is spoken when there is still only one human being, before the other appears. This context of the double commandment must be seen intrinsically in relation to the potential mistake of ha-adamah/ha-adam and iss/issa.

The double commandment is put forward immediately before God decide that it is no good for the earthling to be alone:

> „From all trees in the garden you are free to eat, but from the tree of knowing good and evil you may not eat. On the day you eat there from, you shall certainly die (Genesis 2:16–17).

Indirectly the opposition between all the trees but the one tree of knowing good and evil introduces the thought that something is irreplaceable and that not everything is a matter of the same. A thought which is even more appropriate since the commandment is about eating. The result of consumption is precisely a matter of total

indifference, and respectively there is no chance that the significant name of the tree, should be a pure incidence.

The pericope about the making and naming of the animals may seem as a curious impulse in the narrative, but related to the function of the double commandment it serves the point to show that the other can not be replaced by any other creature.

Therefore when the double commandment is put forward in the middle of the J's scene of creation, precisely between the appearance of the first human being and the second human being, it warns and protects against any replacement of the irreplaceable. As such the double commandment repeats the idea of Imago Dei. Opposite each other the desire of man and woman originates from the face of the irreplaceble and infinitely different other.

Temptation

The serpent is the master of replacements and the scene of temptation is the pivot of describing mankind as subject to the ambivalence between Imago Dei and mimetic desire.

The presentation of the serpent as cunning (arom) intonates the motive of replacement right from the beginning, as it relates to the description of man and woman being naked (aromim). The pun between cunning and naked has supported the interpretation that transgression is a question of sex, obviously presupposing that divine authority and puritanism can be identified. Temptation is about desire, but not as narrow as the focus on sexuality seems to suggest. The pun of arom and aromim point out the snake to be the mediator of shame and further it stages temptation as a masterpiece in replacements. The trick is to replace the image of the creator with another image of God. First the serpent exaggerates the prohibition inherent in the double commandment through an outrageous rendering, which suggests that mankind is allowed to eat from no tree in the garden. In relation to the puns of J's narrative this means that a connection is established between the snake's understanding of the commandment and a threat of death, that mankind may suffer death of hunger.

The serpent's second step performs an eminent exercise in the art of mimetic desire. A reversion of Imago Dei. Girard's theory of mimetic desire suggests that the structure of desire is triangular. Desire is always mediated by a model and as such the object of desire is contingent. Le sujet désire l'objet parce que le rival lui-meme le désire. The other is never just anybody, but always on who presents a being, which the subject doesn't possess. An object which the subject does to the fascination of mimesis regards to be the true object. The true object is however a replacement of truth, in so far as the subject mistakes the lack of being with an object. In the terminology of Levinas this means that desire is mistaken with feeling of need.

Potentially man is modelled after God because of creation act Imago Dei, but crucial to the idea of Imago Dei is the infinite difference between God and man. The serpent reverses the idea of Imago Dei by the illusion that mankind can become like God. Or in other words, the serpent replaces Levinas' concept of desire with Girard's concept of mimetic desire. From the moment when the woman is convinced of the illusion to become like God, the serpent has succeded. Then she is ready to replace God with his object, as the fruit suddenly appears good to eat. Seen from the point of view of mimetic desire it is not possible to differentiate the woman's act from the man's act.

> Just as she listened to the serpent, so Adam listens to Eve. She is to him what the serpent is to her: a mimetic mediator. The two human beings become a continuation of the serpent, and their respective places on its coils does not make either one more guilty than the other, or less. Eve's desire is in no way different from Adam's, neither more nor less mimetic.[16]

Indeed the serpent is a master of great tricks as it manages to draw an image of a God, who appearently wishes the death of mankind and immediately afterwards the serpent manages to make it attractive to become like God. The serpent performs a disclosure of God's ambivalence, produced by an erasure between creator end creation. The result is that God no longer appears to mankind as the one, who unequivocally maintains life by his living breath, but within the antropocentric perspective God of life might be mistaken as the food replacing death.

Transgression and Eating

Through the transgression by eating the image of an ambivalent God becomes manifest in J's story. Life is no longer simple but full of the demands of an enigmatic and shady existence. Respectively, the interpretation of what they saw, when „the eyes of both fell open, grasp knowledge of their naked skin",[17] can by no means be devoid of ambiguity, subordinated as they are to the knowledge of good and evil. With a reference to Schmidt's description of the meal as a social analytical category it is however possible to explicate this ambiguity a bit further by paying a particular attention to the curious fact, that the meal beneath the tree is shared by only two.

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[16] R. Girard *A Theater of Envy, William Shakespeare* (Oxford University Press 1991) p. 324.

[17] Rosenbergs translation *Book of J* (New York) p. 63.

> Now the woman sees how good the tree looks, to eat from, how lovely to the eyes, lively to the mind. To its fruit she reached; ate, gave to her man, there with her, and he ate (Genesis 3:6).[18]

One possible interpretation is that man and woman get caught in the illusion, produced by the mimetic desire, that God is replaceable with his object. Mieke Bal appropriately suggests in a post theological gesture:

> The woman paradoxically realizes the creation of humanity in God's likeness, and by the same token, the creation of literary character, in which God is created in man's likeness.[19]

Subject to this illusion man and woman discover the painful knowledge, that they are what they eat. Immediately man and woman cover themselves up in fig leaves, whereby they demonstrate a striking identity with the plants, brought forth from the earth. Equally they confirm themselves as nourishment, replacements of death, subject as they are to the image of the mass of mud.

But also the act of God exchanging the fig leaves with garments of skin before the expulsion might appear ambivalent. On one hand it is a gesture of care, but it is possible that the skin garments – with a reference to the fact that mankind is taken from the earth, is what he eats – may later be used as an excuse to kill (Genesis 4,1–18).

Conclusively the intertextual play of P and J on the topic of mimesis and desire is not limited to consider the individual exprience of death, but is just as much about violation and death of the other. In the double commandment humanity is reminded of creation Imago Dei and thereby offered a possibility by law to distaste the irreplaceable. The irreplaceable is subject to interpretation and always appearent in the face of the other. Therefore the challenge is to decide, what to eat and what not to eat; thereby to confirm in the image of God, the other as anthropos. Yet always at the risk that this confirmation of equality might take place at the expense of an-other.

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[18] Ibid.

[19] M. Bal (Indiana 1987) p. 124–125.

VERONIKA SPIRA

God, Evil, and the Saviour:
Hermeneutics and the Reconstruction of a Character in Bulgakov's *The Master and Margarita.*

0. (Objectives)

The purpose of this paper is to reconstruct Bulgakov's interpretation of God, Evil, the Saviour and of man on the basis of the text of his novel *The Master and Margarita.* We will approach this task in two phases. In the first part we will attempt to cast light on the fact that Bulgakov's novel itself is concerned with one of the most basic hermeneutical problems: the authentic recostructability of the Gospels, and the possibility of a genuine „hermeneut". Preliminary conclusions will be reached which will bring us closer to our stated aim. The second part will be devoted to an interpretation of the main notions of Bulgakovian „theology". At the end we will answer the question of why the reconstruction of only one character is contained in the title.

1. (Hermeneutic Problems in the Novel)

1.1 (The Basic Hermeneutic Situation) Out of the 32 chapters of The Master and Margarita, four take place in ancient Jerusalem (chapters two, sixteen, twenty-five and twenty-six) relating the story of Christ's life from his interrogation by Pilate to the Crucifixion and interment. Pontius Pilate and Matthew the Levite figure very strongly in this narrative. The former, contrary to what we are told in the Gospels, is secretly a disciple of Christ (Yeshua) who, due to his fear of the emperor, does not acquit the wandering philosopher of the changes levelled against him. Later, however, again against the testimony of the Gospel, he takes revenge upon Judas because of the death of Yeshua. Matthew the Levite is the only disciple of Jesus, the „twelve disciples" proving to be fictitious, and also the only Evangelist. Of his notes, recording the sayings of his Master, Yeshua says: „I once caught a glimpse of that parchment and I was horrified. I had not said a word of what was written there. I begged him: Please burn this parchment of yours. But he tore it from my hands and run away". (Bulgakov 1969, p. 28.) These notes of Matthew the Levite served as the basis of misunderstanding, falsification and fabrication. The basic hermeneutic situation of the novel is therefore the following: our knowledge about Yeshua's life and teaching is inaccurate, false and misleading because the first notes taken about them were already unreliable.

1.2. (The New „Evangelist" or the Perfect Hermeneut) The title character of the novel, the Master, remote both in time and place from the situation described above (living in the city of Moscow, two thousand years later) attempts authentic reconstruction of both the character and the story of Yeshua. His work, as finished, turns out to be identical with the story as found in the four chapters mentioned above (chapters two,

sixteen, twenty-five and twenty-six). Bulgakov considers the Master to be the perfect hermeneut – his work being the perfect Gospel. What is the Master's secret; who is the absolute hermeneut in Bulgakov's view; and what is an authentic reconstruction?

Formerly the Master had worked as a historian in a research institute, until some unexpected luck at gambling brought him a large sum of money. Taking advantage of the independence offered by this windfall, he abandons his job and sets about accomplishing the task which has always fascinated him, the writing of novel about Yeshua Ha-Notsri and Pilate. The Master, a placid and feeble young man, lays obsessive siege to the impossible in a small basement flat (rather than in the usual garret). Several signs and mysterious coincidences lead to the conclusion that his quest has been successful. The first of these is found in chapter two. Woland, with all the accuracy of an eyewitness, conjures up the interrogation of Yoshua before Pilate. This vision, as later becomes obvious, is identical word for word with the first chapter of the Master's novel, without, of course, Woland knowing in the least of the existence of either author or work. The next sign is Ivan's vision in the sanatorium, consisting of the continuation of Woland's story – entirely without collaboration from Woland: the ascent to Golgotha and the crucifixion (chapter sixteen). A mysterious coincidence takes place here too: Ivan's vision is identical to chapter two of the Master's novel. Most important of all, however, is Yeshua's message in chapter twenty-nine. Having read the Master's novel, he presents both to the Master and to his lover a eternal tranquility and rest (op.cit. p.379).

1.3. (Beyond Religion and Science: Bulgakov and Berdyaev.) From several points of view the Master is an unusual hermeneutist: in his case the interpretation of tradition is not bound to texts: indeed he rejects these as misleading. His „preliminary knowledge" however – Gadamer's „historical horizon" – is extensive, in terms of both primary and secondary sources. It is this very grasp of the sources that leads him to consider them useless. In his search for absolute truth the Master reaches beyond both science and religion and becomes an artist, creating the missing, authentic text. His discovery that the „absolute hermeneut" is the creative artist reveals Bulgakov as a disciple of Berdyaev. It was the Russian philosopher who put creation at the summit of cognition, theology and ethics. In his paradoxical ethics *The Destiny of Man* (O Naznachen'ii Cheloveka. Opit Paradoksalnoi Et'iki 1931; English trans. 1937), but already in his *Smisl Tvorchestva* (1916), Berdyaev outlines a world view at the highest point of which stands God the Creator. He is the ideal type of the artist creating the world from the 'Ungrund' (in Böhme's conception of the word), the primeval Nothingness, from ancient chaos (Berdyaev, 1959, pp.23-35.) According to Berdyaevian anthropology man can ascend to God; he can be deified if, after comprehending the ethics of law, (Moses and Kant), and of redemption, (Christ), he comes to understand the essence of the ethics of creativity (the Creator), becoming himself a creative man (Berdyaev, 1959, p. 32). The Master will be able to rise above the Historian, the

Evangelist and other hermeneuts because he has chosen, as his means of cognition, art: creation, the human activity closest to God, replete with many mystical elements. Moreover, the Master is not just one artist among many, but one who is chosen – in whom all human cognition is unified, religion, science and art. In Bulgakov's view the perfect hermeneut is able to harness creativity not just to 'create', but to 'recreate', recollect and reconstruct. Bulgakov's chosen artist is therefore able to recollect or to reconstruct truth wich was otherwise imperfectly bequeathed to us.

1.4. (Paradoxes in Bulgakov's conception of hermeneutics.Totalitarian power as a hermeneutical problem). The conception of hermeneutics evident in the novel contains several paradoxes from a philosophical point of view. The most obvious is that, on the one hand, Bulgakov seems to assert that there is absolute truth which can be perfectly reconstructed, and on the other, in response to the challenges of his time, he radically reinterprets all former truth and interpretation. This contradiction casts light upon an essential problem in the interpretation of the novel itself, the explanation that, in the 1930's when *The Master and Margarita* was being written, the totaliarism prevailing in both East and West represented something entirely new in history forcing us to reinterpret the past, indeed humanity itself. In this regard Bulgakov seeks to answer the following questions in his novel. What if totalitarianism represents the final, inevitable stage of human history? What if individual vulnerability and human frailty can never transcend power? Will former values henceforth become invalid? What, then, will be the subsequent meaning of God, the Devil, the Anti-Christ, the Country of God, Sin and the Last Judgement?

Taking as his point of departure the phenomenology of totalitarian power Bulgakov attemps in this novel to reconsider the whole nature and direction of human history, along with the basic concepts of Christianity, thereby creating a new world-view taking into consideration the facts of the new era. It is this that leads Bulgakov into an unusual „hermeneutic situation" in Gadamer's sense of the word (cf. Gadamer op.cit. p. 214.). It is not a tradition as an „alien opinion" that calls up his prejudices on the subjects of man, humanity, redemption and art, urging him on to the task of interpretation (ibid. p. 214); rather it is the present which initiates his questioning of the past which lies within him, the long past and the future. This is the topic of *The Master and Margarita.*

1.5. (Paradoxes II. The reconstructability of truth and the chaotic nature of existence: Bulgakov's 'diptich'). The existence and rejection of absolute truth , its inacessibility to revelation and its reconsructibility, these paradoxes appear in manifold forms in The Master and Margarita. The four chapters set in ancient times (the novel of the Master) seem to prove the existence and the revealability of absolute truth, while the Moscow chapters suggest that the world is uninterpretable, chaotic, irresistably staggering towards disaster. *The Master and Margarita* is thus a two-panelled Gospel,

a diptych. The two novels contained in it are related in a similar way, in Bakhtin's interpretation, to the two halves of the late Roman double frescoes in Pompeii. One is always a solemn, elevated representation of a myth, while the other is its travesty (Bakhtin, 1976, p.232). One half is a fautless reconstruction of the beginning, the story of Jesus and Pilate, suggestive of the eternal duration of values, while the other is a grotesque, comical report on the End, the ultimate fall of such 'eternal values'. All in all, however, one might say that Bulgakov's novel is an „open" in the sense given to the term by Umberto Eco (1962), in which ambiguity plays a decisive role. The conclusion of the work is no less open, not only to final disaster but to redemption too. Bulgakov's answer to the question posed above allows for the possibility of both a 'yes' and a 'no'.

1.6. (Summary). Let me now summarize to what an investigation of the hermeneutical problems of the novel has led us. First of all, it can be seen that Bulgakov's images of God and man were formed under the influence of the ideas of Berdyaev. Creativity is the highest value; creation is of divine origin and nature; the essence of God is to found in his being as Creator. Only as a creator can man be deified, partake of final secrets, learn the full truth. This is why the Master was able to succeed as nobody before him in the authentic recreation of Yeshua's story.

The harmony of the world in the spirit of creativity is disturbed, however, by the Devil: by evil, identifiable with earthly power. After Berdyaev, Bulgakov holds that this has its origin in the 'Ungrund', God therefore not being responsible for its exsistence (Berdyaev op. cit. pp. 23-44, esp. p. 29). Power in its ultimate totalitarian form becomes uninterpretable and chaotic, turning the world into a scene of paradoxes, rendering doubtful the meaning of creation. Recognizing the qualitative newness of totalitarianism in world-historical terms, Bulgakov attemps to reinterpret the main symbols of European Civilisation and of Christianity. It is as a result of this that duality and ambiguity emerge as the two most important structuring principles in the novel, which, furthermore, arrange Bulgakov's world view between two poles, those of the Beginning and the End, while leaving open the door to both ultimate disaster and to redemption.

We shall now examine how Bulgakov reinterprets these things in *The Master and Margarita,* beginning with the Saviour and following with the Devil.

2. (The basic concepts of Bulgakov's theology)

2.1. (The Saviour I) We have already established that at the summit of Bulgakov's world view stands God, whose presence is only to be inferred in the novel itself. Yeshua on the other hand is represented by two figures: his 'historical' self Yeshua Ha-Notsri, the protagonist of the Master's novel, and than again as a 'transcendental' version of himself. Like God this latter figure does not actually appear in the novel, but we know that his symbol is moonlight, aside from the fact that he appears

in visions both to Pilate and to Ivan: we see him engaged in converstion with the redeemed hegemon while walking along a moonbeem; he it is who sends Matthew the Levite as a messenger to Woland in order to arrange the final fate of the Master and Margarita.

How can we describe the protagonist of the Master's novel Yeshua Ha-Notsri? Bulgakov readily accedes to the conception of Chist passed down in Russian literature and philosophy of religion, that of Dostoevsky and of Berdyaev, above all in his embodiment of love and the principle of indulgence. He considers as alien to Jesus' character the avenging Christ figure of the dies irae, who carries out the wrath of Jehovah. What distinguishes Bulgakov's Christ-image from that of Berdyaev, on the other hand, is that beyond his embodiment of love and mercy, Yeshua has created a system of philosophy in whose spirit he is able to live. Besides being a founder of religion, he is an intellectual. So Bulgakov's Gospel-inspired Saviour unifies in himself two phases of Berdyaev's ethics of redemption and of creativity; that is, meekness and mercy, sovereignty and creative power.

2.2. (The fall of the Saviour I and the Devil) In Bulgakov's interpretation the Saviour's adversary is earthly power in place of the traditional figure of the devil. Following Tacitus, Bulgakov describes the suffocating atmosphere of the reign of Tiberius: the intimidation, and the use of denunciations and the law on high treason as devices of terrorization. That is how Jesus' story becomes a model: because the struggle of goodness, creativity, and human sovereignty with power is quite essential. Contrary to the New Testament, it is for his opinions about state power that Yeshua has to die in the Master's novel.

„I said that ... all power is a form of violance exercised over people, and that the time will come when there will be no rule by Ceasar nor any other form of rule. Man will pass into the kingdom of truth and justice where no form of power will be needed." (Bulgakov op. cit. p. 36)

These words might seem anachronistic, forcing topicality on Christian tradition. Was infringing the power of the state really the highest sin in Jerusalem of those days? Yet it is not really a distortion of the historical evidence. Renan had long before stressed the subversive and revolutionary qualities of the historical Jesus in his *Vie de Jesus* (First edition 1863). Bulgakov amplifies this tendency, and shows in Jesus an archetype of the struggle against the evil of the earthly power.

2.3. (The Devil and man's degradation). Even in the time-frame of the Beginning, in Jerusalem, power is value-destroying. This causes both Yeshua's death and Pilate's sufferings, as well as other catastrophes in the novel. It is, moreover, especially true of Moscow, in which power has taken a totalitarian form. Man, who – in his ideal form, as a creator, is the double of God – here becomes a dwarf, a grotesque

caricature of himself. Only two real human beings can be found in Moscow, the Master and Margarita. The others are ridiculous, pitiful, or malevolent amoebae.

All this, from the point of view of Bulgakov's anthropology, means that his image of man ranges from the human being deified through his own act of creation, to the protozoan degraded and deprived of every human quality through totalitarian power.

2.4. (The ambiguity of prophecy, the Saviour II, and blasphemy). It is crucial point of the interpretation of the novel that the writer leaves the implications of his novel open: they can point, as we had said, either to final disaster, or to redemption. But who can bring redemption in a world in which both Christ and God are meek, benevolent intellectuals? The solution is Woland. He is indubitably Bulgakov's most heretical, most blasphemous, and – on the strenght of scholarship – most enigmatic character, although, on the basis of what has been said above, we must also acknowledge that his role is almost obvious. He is the 'other Saviour' invented and shaped beside the meek C eator and forgiving Christ; Bulgakov developes him in opposition to the newly apprehended lineaments of Evil, that is to power. Woland brings his own redemption, one conceived in revenge and consummated as punishment. It may be inferior to the principles of love and indulgence, according to all humanistic or Christian scales of value – this is, indeed, what Berdyaev contends. However, the practical exigencies of the age are inescapable. It is still necessary to rehabilitate Jehovah, the avenging God; Moses and the law; Kant and the wrathful, justice-bearing Christ of the Dies Irae – in other words, in Berdyaev's terms, the ethics of law. Bulgakov's message, his gospel for his contemporaries, is articulated in this blasphemous Saviour. Woland's character suggests that there is still divine revenge, that there will be an escape from the prisons of power.

2.5. (The Saviour II, and the mixing of myth or „theocrazy"). What can be said about Bulgakov's new Saviour? The writer constructs his figure in a labyrinth fashion. He follows the principle of „theocrasia", the mixing of myths which, appropriately enough, was a widespread phenomenon in the late Roman Empire. (Burckhardt 1924, pp. 147-98). Woland unites in himselves the black magician of medieval popular literature and folklore; Faust; Mephisto; the Devil; Jehovah (striking Sodom); the judging Christ of the dies irae; the Visitor of the gnostics; the Prince of darkness of Böhme. He is magus, devil, God, Christ, a visionary spirit common to gnostics and heretics, a hero of apocryphal and apocaliptic writings. This promiscuous interweaving of myths might seem blasphemous in intent, but it is not. When we examine his deeds, we find that this seemingly mysterious and multifaceted figure acts according to a very simple logic and system of values: he relentlessly avenges the sin he considers the worst of all, that is, time-serving, the allegiance to Evil, such as to repressive earthly power. His first victim is Berlioz, who is – in the symbolic logic of the novel – the Grand Inquisitor, the Procurator and govenor of the Antichrist's empire. Baron Meigel, a professional informer, follows him, and is in turn followed by a long line of simirarly

repellent figures. But it is also through Woland's doing that Pilate takes vengeance on Judas, because the chief of the hegemon's secret police, Aphranius, is a version (alterego) of Woland as well (Gasparov, 1978, pp. 198-251; Spira, 1989, pp. 104-117). Aphranius not only lures the hegemon to take revenge, but organizes its fulfilment as well.

2.6. (The position of the Saviour II, in Bulgakov's scale of values). What is the place of Woland, that is, of the principle of revenge, in Bulgakov's value-system? What is the relationship between the two redemptions he portrays, that of indulgence and that of punishment? On the one hand – and in this he is quite close to Böhme's conception – they are complementary „like light and darkness" as Woland himself puts it in Chapter 23 (op. cit. p. 378). On the other hand – and this is much more important – vengeance appears as a servant of Goodness. Woland arranges the fate of the Master and his mistress in accord with Yeshua's message. It is only a small detail complementing but not altering the major action, in which, in defense of Goodness, justice and vengeance strike at Evil and destroy its power.

Bulgakov's attitude toward this principle is still ambivalent. On one hand, it is clear that, without it, Goodness suffers from weakness and inanition against absolute power, and is fated to fail. It is obvious as well that Woland's judgements are in harmony with the ethical norms expounded by Saint Thomas Aquinas or by Dante in Divine Comedy. There is, however an enigma in the novel, which reflects this ambivalence. Many readers and scholars have found it difficult to explain why Yeshua considers the Master unworthy of being raised to heaven. Instead, he offers the Master eternal tranquility and rest, while calling Pilate – who sent him to the cross – to himself instead. This can be explained when we see that the two title-characters cannot choose between the two Saviours offered them, between indulgence and vengeance. Both love, both forgive; but they hate and long for revenge as well. Margarita, becoming a witch, takes revene on Latunsky, the critic who destroyed the Master; as a wildcat, she leaps on Aloysius Mogarich, who informed against him. The Master speaks with hatred of the host of pseudo-writers and poetasters who work in the livery of power. He hears of Berlioz' death with nothing but pleasure. Margarita, at the same time, intervenes on behalf of the child-killing Frida because she feels the women has purged and paid for her sin, and now deserves redemption. The Master absolves Pilate after two thousand years of punishment, releasing him to ride on the moonbeam leading toward Jeshua: „You are free!" he shouts, „Free! He is waiting for you." (Bulgakov, op. cit., p. 401). Both the Master and Margarita serve two Saviours throughout the novel. They cannot follow Woland to the Empire of darkness, because they still beleive in mercy. On the other hand, they cannot ascend to the realm of light, because they beleive in vengeance as well. Therefore, they are given eternal rest in the earthly Paradise. For, in the „cosmology" of Dante and Bulgakov, Paradise belonges the Empires of neither darkness

nor light; it stands exactly on the borders of these, on the top of the mount of Purgatory. Therefore, sustaining and reinforcing the fate of the world, Bulgakov raised mercy and creativity to the apex of his scale of values. He does not for a moment imply, however, that either he or his alterego the Master could forgive – or could even desire to forgive – the Berliozes of the world, or Baron Meigels, or Latunskys.

3. Conclusion

Starting from the hermeneutical problems addressed by the work, we have been able to reconstruct Bulgakov's concept of God, of the Saviour, of the Evil, and of Man. It was mentioned in the title that this could be achieved through examining a single character: for the key to the interpretation of these concepts is clearly Woland, even if we have only been able to arrive at the elucidation of his character in an inductive fashion, and even if his role has only been clarified at the end of this paper. It is his character which makes clear an essential fact: that in Bulgakov's „theology" the Devil has nothing to do with Evil, that Evil is earthly power and that its ultimate form is the totalitarian state.

It becomes clear as well, while examining Woland's character, that there are two Saviours in Bulgakov's thinking. One of them is the reconstructed Jesus, whose figure follows the outlines drawn in the philosophy of Berdyaev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky. He is nothing but the bearer of goodness and the dispenser of mercy, and he is alien from the principle of judgement. He is Bulgakov's Yeshua, who unites in himself the Bredyaevian etics of redemption and creativity. The other is Woland. He is needed because the meek Saviour and the benevolent God the Creator, two intellectuals, are not able to free man from the captivity of power. In the character of Woland, Bulgakov rehabilitates the ethic of Berdyaevian law – that is, Jehovah, Moses, Kant, the ethics of punishment and revenge. These principles of vengeance and of divine jurisdiction and interdiction were previously detached from Jesus' character. The essence of the dilemma described, and of the paradox inscribed, in the novel lies here. On the one hand Bulgakov believes – on his own behalf, and on that of his two title-characters and the majority of his contemporaries – in the desire for a redemption through vengeance, a desire born in a permanent frustration and dispair. On the other hand, he still raises the principles of forgiveness and creativity to a valorized status over those of vengeance and punishment: a stance he asserts without ever professing that he himself is able to forgive.

After having subjected the chief concepts of the Bulgakovian „theology", and of his depiction of the world to a thorough analysis, we can come to one overriding conlcusion. We can declare that these concepts can be understood, first of all, as a response to the intellectual challenge of totaliarianism. Bulgakov found himself in an „inverted" hermeneutical situation while composing his novel. He was himself the

tradition which was addressed and deformed by a present alien from him. This stimulated him in a provocative way to interpret it. Responding to this influence, the writer outlines the phenomenology of the present – that is, of totalitarianism. That is the burden of the Moscow chapters. At the same times, he considers and reinterprets tradition in the Jerusalem chapters, searching for its persistent or renewed validity in both the present and the future. While the insight into totalitarianism led George Orwell to create a negative utopia, dysthopic vision of the day-after-tomorrow's hell, Bulgakov strives to salvage values from beneath the ruins of today, and to find in them a purpose and hope for tomorrow as well.

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ABSTRACTS

SUBJECTIVITY AND DIVINITY IN BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

DAVID E. KLEMM

In order to make a constructive claim of its own, this paper inspects the challenge frequently made in postmodern discourse that the theologian or literary critic should „escape" the logocentric tradition of subjectivity and divinity in the West, thus engaging in a discourse no longer grounded in „the good will" of hermeneutics but the eternal movement of *„difference"*. What does this claim mean? To answer this, I inspect its rhetorical and dialectical dimensions. Rhetorically, the claim appeals to the principle of affirmation through negation (Heidegger, Jonas, Ricoeur), which has some plausibility. Dialectically, the thinking behind the claim is not up to the rhetorical task. Among other faults of reflection, it fails to distinguish the empirical will from the structure of freedom making possible that will to escape. The empirical will cannot escape the transcendental structure of freedom, which is itself the very heart of „logocentrism", any more than „I" can escape my „self".

The paper argues that hermeneutics is not something that goes out of style, for understanding is not something that can be gone beyond. Moreover, understanding, both in its structural possibility and in its concrete realizations, is ineluctably borne through a cultural tradition. Participation in the tradition is the abiding condition of understanding. The tradition can be modified and transformed, it can wither and die out, but it cannot be escaped. Indeed, the real situation is that the absolutes which necessarily manifest themselves within the logocentric tradition continue to escape us. These absolutes are the principles of absolute subjectivity and absolute being or divinity. How do they appear in biblical hermeneutics?

The author draws on the biblical hermeneutics of Schleiermacher and Ricoeur in isolating three steps in the answer. First, „God is" appears to the understanding in the activity of reading texts, while preserving its own escape from texts into manifold existence as „I am". Second, the „I am" appears to the understanding in the activity of following existence, while preserving its own escape from existence into maifold texts as „God is". (The movements here from text to existence or existence to text are reciprocal and can equally well be reserved.) Third, „God is" and „I am" appear together in the activity of correlating text and existence.

In conclusion, the paper argues that the theologian and literary critic ought to seek a self-understanding not in the effort to escape the tradition but in the affirmation of the reflexive principle by means of which we can understand the appearing and escaping of subjectivity and divinity from reflection.

MARTIN BUBER'S DIALOGICAL BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

STEPHEN KEPNES

In his famous book, *Wahrheit und Methode,* Hans-Georg Gadamer suggests that interpretation is a matter of developing a „dialogue" with a text that culminates in a „fusion of horizons" between the world of the reader and the world of the text. This dialogue is based on an immediate relation to the text that is destroyed by excessive attention to critical methodologies. In *Ich und Du,* Martin Buber presents a model for conditions that foster genuine dialogue. In this paper the author argues that Buber used his philosophy of dialogue as the hermeneutical principle through which he read the Hebrew Bible. The principle of dialogue lead him to regard the biblical text as „sacred", „whole", as „Thou" and fostered his sensitivity to the literary and poetic quality of the text. The author also argues, however, that in contrast to Gadamer, Buber saw that historical critical methods did not destroy the I-Thou dialogue with the text but could be used to further that dialogue. Thus, Buber's biblical hermeneutics combines literary with historical critical methodologies in an endeavor to bring about a genuine dialogue with the biblical text. The philosophic grounds for a combined dialogic and critical hermeneutic method are most eloquently expressed in the hermeneutical philosophy of Paul Ricoeur and the author briefly refer to Ricoeur at the end of his paper.

BIBLICAL CRITICISM AND THEOLOGY: TOWARDS A NEW BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

WERNER JEANROND

This article investigates the relationship of biblical studies and theological thinking in the light of recent hermeneutical reflection. It raises the question of what is the next step in a constructive theological programme after David Tracy's important insights into the hermeneutical character of theological reflection. In a first section the author examines both the hermeneutical imperative of critical theological thinking and the call for praxis with ehich all critical theology is confronted today. The second section deals more specifically with the relationship between biblical criticism and theology in view of this persistent call for a more praxis-oriented theology. It discusses briefly the hermeneutical models of Fuchs, Ebeling, Gadamer, Barth, and Tracy and then addresses the question of what it means „to understand" the biblical text. Relating Tracy's pluralistic hermeneutics and Schleiermacher's programme for a genuinely dialectical theology, the author concludes that biblical criticism is only one of the essential tasks of theology which may be distinguished but never separated from the overall ethical (or

political) concern of Christian theology. Thus, some new form of biblical theology is called for, not a renewal of older attempts to impose theologies on the Bible, but a genuine reflection on the contribution of biblical criticism to the larger theological project of searching for ways of living responsible lives today.

LITERARY MODERNISM AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS: THE BIBLE AS LITERATURE?

BERNARD ZELECHOW

Modern consciousness contributes both to the devaluation of and paradoxically to the revaluation of the biblical texts in contemporary culture in relation to art. Literary modernism leads to an appropriate hermeneutical secularism that transforms the Hebrew Bible specifically, and biblical texts in general, into analogues of modernist literary products. The modernist critics include Robert Alter, Gabriel Josepovichi, Harold Bloom offer hermeneutical insight that are provocative and penetrating. However, these theorists have failed to explore the underlying presuppositions which ground the literary hermeneutical theory. This paper will examine the implicit intellectual cultural underpinnings that incorporates the biblical texts into the literary corpus of Western culture. The literary critic asks, can the Bible be read in light of modernist literature? The answer for these thinkers is, yes. For these writers the values imbedded in the biblical texts. Implicitly these writers assert that we turn to literature for indights into the meaning of life in the way our ancestors read the Bible. As a benefit to both biblical study and literature a biblical hermeneutics and a theology of art should reverse the contemporary question. The new question is: can a work of literature be read meaningfully in the absence of the biblical framework? The question implies the necessity to examine the nature and function of art in Western culture, the meaning of a biblical platform in a secular world, the nature of biblical critique and the aesthetic unmasking tradition, the biblical conception of the paradox of freedom, the nature of human action and the biblical structure of redemtion and sanctification at its relation to the aesthetic concept of transformation. The underlying argument behind the reversal of the question of the relationship of art to the Bible is the premise that the implicit and unacknowledged grounds of modernity is biblical. In other words the Bible is the archetype of all speech and discourse. The praxis of biblical interpretation is the grounds of all reading and therefore of all theory. Concommitantly a theology of art requires the illumination of the relationship between critique an hope, social description and personal transformation. Finally this paper will sketch the ways in which art that is not grounded implicitly falls into nihilism and self-contradiction. Conversely this paper will explore the way in which biblical presuppositions potentially redems explicitly unredeemable works of art.

READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM AND NEW TESTAMENT HERMENEUTICS

EDGAR V. MCKNIGHT

Reader-response criticism approaches to biblical literature in terms of the values, attitudes, and response of readers. The reader, therefore, plays a role in the „production" or „creation" of meaning and significance. This role of the reader relativizes the conventional view that the text is an achieved structure of meaning. Radical reader-response approaches also challenge conventional views concerning the autonomous critic and the scientific objective process of reading and criticism. Insights and strategies of reader-response criticism valuable for New Testament hermeneutics are in danger of being neglected today because of radical deconstructive moves and because of a reactionary suspicion of and retreat from non-conventional approaches in light of the perceived threat of deconstruction.

The question of language is at the center of the different varieties of reader response criticism. Three positions may be observed in the work of Stanley Fish and Wolfgang Iser: (1) the early Fish emphasized the temporal dimension of reading rather than the spatial form of the text as the essential factor in meaning, but he also maintained the integrity of language and the text with the result that „ informed readers" come to basically the same evaluation of literary texts; (2) Iser advocated a phenomenological approach which maintains the integrity of poetic consciousness and intention with the result that readers' intentions are determined by the text and are in continuity with the intention of the author; and (3) the later Fish seems to question all that the New Critics and the phenomenologists assumed concerning such matters as the nature of reality, the autonomy of the self, the stability of literary texts, and the independence of fact and meaning from value and interpretation. Can room be made for the substantial contribution of actual readers in the actualization of biblical texts (contributions in which the different national and faith communities of readers make a difference, for example) without denying the integrity of language. The pioneering work of early East European Formalists will be explicated as providing ways of conceiving of language and the language of literature so as to maintain the integrity of language and to take account of culture and individual valuation.

How can the insights and strategies of the deconstruction of Jaques Derrida be incorporated? One way woul be to interpret Derrida as intending what East European Formalists discovered, the fact that discourse is not simply governed from without by some nondiscoursive atemporal ground. Discourse is always governed in part by rules which are subject to historical transformations. Truth and rationality are always constrained within historical determinations. Knowledge, language, meaning, and interpretation, however, are set by Derrida not just within a dynamic cultural context but at the same time within a context of power and authority. Deconstruction, then, is

concerned with the examination of the desire for mastery – the mastery of knowledge through language and meaning theough interpretation – and the subversion of that desire through the very nature of the language itself.

How can a reader enter into the world of the text on the condition set up by the text and construct a unified piece out of the structures offered by the text and yet give conscious attention to the impulse toward and result of the synthesizing and saturating in order to break its „domination"?

The paper examines the values and challenges of reader-response insights and strategies for New testament hermeneutics and illustrates the approach with a reading of Luke 5:1–11.

RHETORICAL CRITICISM IN NEW TESTAMENT INTERPRETATION: AN APPRAISAL AND A PROPOSAL

DENNIS L. STAMPS

The recent plethora of rhetorical critical analyses of New Testament epistles suggest that G. E. Kennedy's proposal in his brief book, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism,* is having a significant impact on New Testament studies. On a smaller scale, other scholars are exploring the social-rhetoric and the literary dimensions of New Testament epistles. What are we to make of these rhetorical and literary approaches to the New Testament?

In order to appraise these interpretative strategies, their recent development and application will be chronicled. For rhetorical criticism, the development from James Muilenburg's 1968 SBL Presidential address to W. Wuellner's provocative article: „Where is Rhetorical Criticism Taking Us", (CBQ 49 (1987) 448ff.) will be traced. With respect to literary approaches to N.T. epistles, the work of N. Petersen and his sociological-narratology, the text-linguistic approach of the Uppsala School, plus structuralism in its various guises are examined.

After surveying the interpretive landscape for the interpretation of N.T. epistles, a number of the inderlying assumptions which are operative in literary and rhetorical criticism will be explored. First, a basic understanding of textuality is examined as the major premise for these critical approaches. Textuality, while defined in many ways, suggests that texts are a distinct kind of language discourse from spoken language with a particular understanding of context. Next the way in which interpretive goals are set in the various critical approaches are analyzed in order to relate them to this understanding of textuality and context.

Finally, a proposal is made for linking a literary-rhetorical understanding of texts as a way to interpret N.T. epistles. First, the nature and scope of rhetoric in texts is posited, suggesting that all texts have a persuasive element. Second, and interpretive strategy which seeks to analyze and evaluate the rhetorical nature of N.T. epistles is explored based on the communication model of speaker/text/audience. Third, the theological implications of this interpretive approach is explored.

HOW TO AVOID WRITING ABOUT GOD: SOME FRENCH POSTSTRUCTURALIST PHILOSOPHERS AND BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

KERRY MCKEEVER

In one of his fairly recent essays, Jean-Luc Nancy commented that we live in a world without God – the world after Nietzsche killed off God. Nancy then poses the question, „what do we do now?" The question is an interesting one for many poststructuralist critics relative to biblical hermeneutics. It seems that in the aftermath of Nietzsche, there is almost an embarrassment associated with, and a reluctance to write on, Biblical subjects. However, there is an intriguing tendency among these philosophers/critics to write about the Bible, to literally skirt the Bible or to refer to it only through another text or texts. Certainly, we see this in Derrida's essay on Edmund Jabes or in his *d'un ton apocalyptique adopte neguere en philosophie,* in Jean Francois Lyotard's *instruction paiennes,* Phillipe Lacoue-Labarthe and Jean Luc Nancy's „Noli me frangere", and Julia Kristeva's *The Powers of Horror.*

In the presentation, these works are examined in terms of their „negative" power, in terms of the manner in which each writer approaches what we might consider a „taboo" subject in philosophy in order to engage in a new type of biblical hermeneutic, a speaking about the Bible throught the agency of a mediating „Other" text.

THE CASE FOR GROUNDING BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS UPON THE DIACHRONIC METHOD

BERNARD M. LEVINSON

Recent developments within Hebrew Bible scholarship, in particular, the emergence of a new „literary criticism", promised a renewed concern with key interpretive issues that too frequently have been bypassed by the more conventional diachronic (historical-critical) method. The new approach, because of its emphasis upon a synchronic methodology, treats the biblical text as a coherent product of authorial

intentionality, similar to a contemporary literary complexity. The newer synchronic method tends to disavow the classical questions of „Higher" or „Lower" Criticism: establishing the date and historical context of the text, distinguishing separate literary sources within it, analyzing text-critical or redactional issues, and so on.

The intellectual origins, the methodological implications, and the hermeneutical presuppositions of this new method, which is increasingly becoming the norm for those scholars concerned with questions of interpretation and hermeneutics, have received little critical examination. The paper on which my presentation is based attempts to help fill this gap. Using Meir Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (1985) as a point of departure, the paper has a triple focus:

(1) To provide the context for the emergence of the new synchronic approach as a reaction against the failure of diachronic analysis to address questions of coherence and meaning. The synchronic approach in many ways backtracks behind the early modern period to adopt a pre-critical biblical hermeneutics as a ploy against the historical method.

(2) To demonstrate that the synchronic method contradicts its own mandate. By rejecting diachronic analysis as essentially irrelevant (as merely providing access to background or to „context" rather than „text"), the synchronic method cannot achieve its avowed goal of providing an adequate conceptualization of the biblical text. An examination of the biblical flood story (Genesis 6–9) reveals important *literary* aspects of the text unavailable to a purely synchronic method. Precisely those aspects, as revealed by a diachronic method, are indispensable any theoretical statement concerning ancient Israelite notions of textual coherence and complexity.

(3) To show that the synchronic method, in basing itself almost entirely on biblical narrative or poetic texts, further removes its own ground in attempting to provide anadequate hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible. The legal corpora of the Bible, essentially ignored by the new approach, not only are clearly „literary" in their composition and structure, but also provide essential access to Israelite notions of authorship, interpretation, and textual authority.

On these counts, any adequate future hermeneutics of the Hebrew Bible must be grounded conjointly upon the synchronic and the diachronic methods and, no less conjointly, upon law and narrative.

THE CHANGING OF THE HOST: TRANSLATION AND LINGUISTIC HISTORY

STEPHEN PRICKETT

Translation was, and remains, one of the most powerful and effective means of literary appropriation. Christianity is unique in that is has quite openly taken the greater part of its scriptures from *another* religion. Translation was historically an essential tool in this, probably the most sweeping appropriation in history.

C. F. Volney's hipothesis in *Ruins of Empire* (1791), namely, that the Old Testament not being the oldest written text in the world, but that the Hebrew Scriptures had appropriated and altered yet earlier Egyptian, Sumerian, and Babylonian writings – which is still a matter of debate today (see for instance the work of Van Seters) – is paralleled both by this well-documented fact of the Christian appropriation of Hebrew Scriptures, and the Protestant appropriation of the Catholic Bible at the Reformation. Each of these appropriations was accompanied by a radical shift in critical and hermeneutic theory to justify the takeover. As Mary Ann Tolbert has pointed out, modern biblical scholarship often starts by assuming that „the New Testament texts were fairly reliable windows onto ... history rather than the ideological products of it". The evidence for the degree to which translation theory is not just culturally variable, but also heavily dependent in shifts in theology, is, surprisingly, still not sufficiently acknowledged by many modern translators (e.g. Eugene Nida).

OF SCRIPTURE, PARADOX AND INTERPRETATION
„What is written in the law? How do you read?"[1]

BRAYTON POLKA

The paper explores how writing, law and reading are tighly bound up with the paradox of interpretation (the interpretation of paradox). The author argues that outside paradox and interpretation there is no writing, no law, and no reading. There is nothing outside paradox and interpretation. But if there is nothing – no writing, law or reading – outside paradox and interpretation, then it follows that there is no writing outside Scripture and no Scripture outside writing. Where writing is, there must the Bible be; and where the Bible is, there must writing be. To embrace the revelation that there is nothing outside writing/Scripture (paradox and interpretation) is to deconstruct all hierarchial (binary or contradictory) oppositions between literature, philosophy, theology – and scripture: the Bible/writing – by showing that Ezekiel's critical distinction between the new spirit of the heart of flesh and the old heart of stone entails that between metaphor and simile, paradox and contradiction, interpretation and analysis, truth and idol, reason and logic, history and myth, freedom (salvation) and slavery (sin), faith and ...[2]If there is nothing outside the written law of reading (reading the written law), then scripture (Scripture) eternally constitutes modernity as the crisis of history in which the undecidably free choice of the covenant overcomes all dualisms between

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[1] „And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, *'What is written in the law? How do you read?'* And he answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind [Deut. 6,5]; and your neighbor as yourself [Lev. 18,18]'. And he said to him, 'you have answered right; do this, and you will live'". Luke 10,25–28 (RSV) Compare Matt. 22,35–40: „And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question, to test him. 'Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?' And he said to him, 'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it, You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the law and the prophets.'" See Luke 16,16–17: „'The law and the prophets were until John; since then the good news of the kingdom of God is preached, and every one enters it violently. But it is easier for heaven and earth to pass away, than for one dot of the law to become void'".

[2] an adequate idea of the relationship between writing, law, and reading is consistent both with Derrida's hermeneutical argument that „there is nothing outside the text" – including that self-referential claim itself – and with Spinoza's ontological argument that it is eternally (historically) undecidable whether we begin (and) with thought (interpretation) or existence. There is nothing outside interpretation; there is nothing outside existence. There is no interpretation outside (its) existence; there is no existence outside (its) interpretation. Spinoza's ontological argument – the cause of itself (there is nothing outside substance) – ethically recapitulates his hermeneutical claim that the Bible must be rationally interpreted from itself alone by faithful readers from themselves alone.

precritical and postcritical, between premodern (religious) and postmodern (secular), between prehistorical and posthistorical. There is nothing outside scripture: „What is written in the law? How do you read?"

METAPHOR „IS LIKE THE OWNER OF A HOUSE WHO TAKES NEW AND OLD THINGS OUT OF HIS STOREDOM" (On Metaphor and Hermeneutics)

LÓRÁNT BENCZE

The traditional and most common interpretation of metaphor is based on the simple opposition of literal versus figurative sense. This dichotomy is also considered alternative and the terms logically disjunctive. The theory of „reconstruction" relies on these and supposes that a text always offers enought proof for deciding which alternative to choose. In the theory of „deconstruction" the above problems do not appear only as a consequence of oversimplification. Interpretation is essentially so manifold that it is hardly more than accidental

Origen set up a trichotomy of interpretation when writing on somatic, psychic and pneumatic senses. Though one may dispute what he meant by these terms, one cannot ab ovo reject the advantage of it in practice and in relation to the traditional and structuralist dichotomy and to the vague freedom of deconstruction. Whereas the present author ascribes meanings to Origen's terms, which this way cover the problem-field of theories mentioned, the main point is that origen excluded disjunction from interpretation. He thought that the three senses are always together, are inseparable, yet never confused. Thus some twentieth century opinions on the interpretation of metaphor (e.g. interaction theory) seem to be very close to Origen. At the same time his ideas may launch and stimulate new researches to come.

THE LITERAL SENSE AND THE „SENSUS PLENIOR" REVISITED

TIBOR FABINY

In the first part, the author provides a historical survey of the idea of the literal sense of Scripture up to the period of the Reformation. Theological interpretation was assumed to be the strongest when it rested on the literal sense. The School of Antioch, Hugh of St Victor or Nicholas of Lyra stressed the significance of the *sensus literalis* against the dominant allegorical tendencies in the Middle Ages. These Christian scholars have learnt much from the idea of peshat in Jewish exegesis. Luther also stressed the

significance of the literal sense and with regard to the Old Testament his concern was to explore the *sensus literalis propheticus.* Some of the Reformers like Flacius or Perkins consciously adopted the term „scope" by which the literal sense was to be disclosed. The Reformers were interested in the scope of the text and not in the scope of the author, nor in the historical reference.

The literal sense has gone through some distortions in the centuries following the Reformation. On the populist level it has degenerated into literalism or fundamentalism. The attitude of seeking the criterion of the „truth" of texts in the external events are probably due to what Northrop Frye calls the „descriptive-demotic" phase of language. A distortion of the literal sense has taken place also in high criticism. As Brevard Childs has shown the *sensus literalis* became identified with the *sensus historicus* or *sensus originalis.* The consequence of this attempt was to remove all the interpretative layers of Scripture in order to arrive at the original, authentic meaning.

The third part of the paper is concerned with the idea of recovering the integrity of the literal sense. Some models are offered to achieve this, like the notion of the canonical context, the rediscovery of the „scope", a recognition of the *sensus plenior* of Scripture and fourthly, the literary-critical model of the literal meaning as being presented in the works of Northrop Frye.

INTERPRETATION OF BEGINNINGS: NARRATION AND DOCTRINE

GERDA ELATA-ALSTER & RACHEL SALMON

Readings of the story of creation in the book of genesis ordinarily focus upon referentiality; they paraphrase and explicate what the text tells us about how the world came into being. Even literary approaches, which attend to the way that the formal properties of the text engender meaning, still seek the world behind the words. We might, however, ask an additional question: can we learn anything from the language of the story of creation about the creation of language itself?

We note, first of all, that language of Genesis does not only describe the creative act, but actually the tool of creation. Interspersed within the narrating voice, are the direct quotations of the divine speech which brought things into being. In terms of modern Speech Act Theory, those quotations would be classed as supernatural declaratives. When G-d says: „Let there be light", there is as yet no world to which these words can refer; only at their utterance does light come into existence.

Unlike other sorts of speech acts which seek, without ever fully succeding, to make the word fit the world (assertives), or the world fit the word (directives and commissives), declaratives actually close the gap between language and a state of affairs

in the world. They can do this because they function within a closed system of extra-linguistic constitutive rules which endow them with this definitive power. For instance, the court is indeed open once the properly appointed official pronounces the words designated by the judiciary institution. The reason this works is that a social or ritual definition hs become accepted as itself a reality.

According to Searle, extra-linguistic support of this sort can be dispensed with only in meta-linguistic and supernatural declaratives. Meta-linguistic declaratives are not dependent upon extra-linguistic constitutive rules because they function only within the linguistic system; they bring about a change in the language, not in the world. We may agree to use language in a certain way for purely formal reasons which make no appeal to reality. Supernatural declarations, in the other hand, bear a direct relationship to reality; they make it! From Searle's examples we learn that the supernatural declarations that he has in mind are those world-creating pronouncements which open the Book of Genesis. Their language does not refer to a pre-existing state of affairs, but brings some state of affairs into existence. In this sense, supernatural declarations are also definitive; they put in place a world to which language can refer.

It would thus appear to be inevitable that the supernatural declarations of Genesis create a world which fully conforms to G-d's world-making word; no source of distance between word and world is apparent. When G-d says: „Let there be light", the coming into existence of light coincides with the utterance. Man, too, seems to have been created by the same sort of declaration, but a close examination of its language reveals several differential features.

Until the sixth day of creation all of the divine declarations follow a similar grammatical pattern: the creatures are fully defined by their stated function. The creation of man, however, is accomplished through a declaration which foregrounds, both grammatically and semantically, the play of dimilarities and differences characteristics of human language. While the Speech Act: „Let us make man in our image after our likeness", which brings the creature into existence declaratively, as in all the other cases, it also introduces new grammatical distinctions. The first person speaking subject entails the categories of second and third person upon which subject/object relations are posited, and the syntax and semantics of the phrase „in our image, after our likeness" suggests comparison, that is similarity and relatedness rather than identity. The language, then, which creates man simultaneously makes evident the way that man, the only creature who shares language with G-d, will function.

It is perhaps significant that the Book of Genesis is silent about the creation of speech. We suggest, that the way language functions in the creation story, enacts the evolution of human language itself. Furthermore, there is a rationale for enacting rather than explicating the human linguistic faculty. An analysis of Adam's naming of the animals in the Garden of Eden exemplifies the conditions of man's freedom in respect to G-d and the world. Any attempt to speak definitively about these aspects of human

speech would be a pretense that words can be adequate to reality. it is only language's acting out of its function, rather than an assertion of its essence which can provide a figure for that which differentiates man both from the other creatures and from his creator.

The Jewish hermeneutic tradition has always given high priority to language, has indeed imagined it as prior to all other aspects of reality. In this paper, we shall show how midrashic readings of the first chapters of the Book of Genesis reflect upon the role of man through the figure of a speaking creature, and through the figures of speech of the primary text.

THE ROLE OF „WISDOM" IN THE INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

GERALD T. SHEPPARD

The aim of the essay is both to describe the presentation of „wisdom" in association with Solomon in the Old Testament and to draw out some hermeneutical implication for conemporary biblical interpretation. Wisdom proves to be an idiom within scripture, similar to Torah in association with Moses and prophecy linked to various named persons and biblical books. While wisdom is not „secular", God and prayer belong to it as essential topics, it does appear to bracket out of its vocabulary other key elements necessary for Jewish Torah and prophecy, including the themes of election, the giving of the law, and Israel's salvation history. In its owns unique manner, it seeks a conversation with the world and is even willing to let the world test its, alleged wisdom. For contemporary hermeneutics, such a biblical presentation of wisdom demands an openess to wisdom wherever it may be found in the world and a vulnerability to critique by others in the world regardless of religious beliefs. It, also, points to the necessary capacity of a biblical interpreter and refine the questions he or she asks of the two, and, therefore, affects the possible reception of the Word of God as found elsewhere in Scripture. So, for example, the hearing of the Torah and its semantic import for contemporary issues is partly determined by the sapiential capacity of the interpreter to ask wise rather than foolish question of the scriptural witness to the Torah and the Gospel. What constitutes a „wise" question is partly determined by a robust and self-critical extra-biblical conversation with the world about wisdom.

IMAGO DEI AND DESIRE IN GENESIS 1–3. TO EAT OR NOT TO EAT: OR RATHER TO EAT OT WHAT TO EAT

KRISTEN M. ANDERSON

Within modern criticism, particularly with references to Levinas and Girard, the article is the revision of the traditional interpretation relating *imago Dei* with the story of temptation and expulsion. The two creation accounts hold different perspectives on creation. P holds a theocentric perspective and G and antropocentric one. Due to the tension between the two accounts, they can be seen as a negotiation of the two concepts, explicating the difference between violence replacement and irreplacebility. The difference appears particularly in G's obsession with food and the idea if what to eat and what not to eat.

GOD, EVIL, AND THE SAVIOUR: HERMENEUTICS AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF A CHARACTER IN BULGVAKOV'S THE MASTER AND MARGARITA

VERONIKA SPIRA

This paper reconstructs Bulgakov's interpretation of God, Evil, The Saviour, and of Man on the basis of the text of *The Master and Margarita.* This objective is approached in two stages. The first part of the paper examines Bulgakov's novel as a treatment of one of the most basic hermeneutical problems, that of the authentic reconstructability of Christ's story – involving not only the genuineness of the Gospels but the possibility of a real „hermeneut". The second part of the paper interprets the main ideas of Bulgakov's „theology".

Our principal thesis is that, in *The Master and Margarita,* Bulgakov – beginning from the phenomenology of totalitarian power – attempts to re-interpret the nature and the direction of human history and the central concepts of Christianity, and to create a world view which takes into consideration the existential situation offered by the modern period.

In this sense, Bulgakov found himself in an usual, or (more precisely) an „inverted" hermeneutical situation (I am using the concept in the Gadamerian sense). Tradition as an alien body of thought does not address him, assaulting his prejudices and forcing him to interpret it. (Gadamer, op. cit., p. 212.) It is the present that confronts him with its provocative influence, assaulting his prejudices about man, humanity, art, redemption, evil, etc.

The paper finds Bulgakov's image of God and man to be in close accord with Bulgakov's theories. In particular, it considers the influence of *The Destiny of Man* (O naznachen'ii cheloveka. Opit paradoksalnoi et'iki.) Like Berdyaev, Bulgakov considers creativety the highest value. In his interpretation, creation is of divine origin, and God's essence lies in his creativity. The creator is the ideal form of man. The perfect hermeneut can only be the chosen artist who unifies in himself all the three forms of knowledge, religion, science, and art.

Only one character's reconstruction is mentioned in the title. The reason for this is that the key to the Bulgakovian theology is clearly Woland, even if his character can only be clarified inductively and only at the end of the paper. it is his character that proves that, to Bulgakov, the devil has nothing to do with Evil. Evil is earthly power and, in its ultimate form, is embodied in the totalitarian state. It also becomes clear in examining Woland's character that there are two Saviours in *The Master and Margarita.* One is Jesus, reconstructed according to the ideas of Berdyaev, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky: he is the bearer of goodness and mercy, alien from judgment. The other is Woland, the principle of punishment and vengeance. He is necessary because the meek Saviour and creative God, two intellectuals, cannot free man man from captivity to power.

In Woland's character, Bulgakov rehabilitates the Berdyaevian ethics of law: Jehovah, Moses, and Kant, and the Last Judgment, all of which were previously divorced from Jesus' character, are reinscribed in it. The paradox and dilemma expressed in the novel are essentially that, on the on hand, Bulgakov sees himself, his two title characters, and the majority of his contemporaries trapped in permanent frustration and despair, and desiring redemption by vengeance. On the other hand, he still elevates the principle of mercy and creativity over vengeance, without however claiming that he himself would ever be able to forgive.

Having subjected the central concepts of Bulgakov's „theology" and world-view to hermeneutical reconstruction, we can declare first of all that they constitute a response to totalitarianism. The insight into totalitarianism led George Orwell to imagine a nightmare vision of dystopia. By contrast, bulgakov seeks to salvage values from beneath the ruins of the present, and to find as well a purpose and a hope for tomorrow.

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